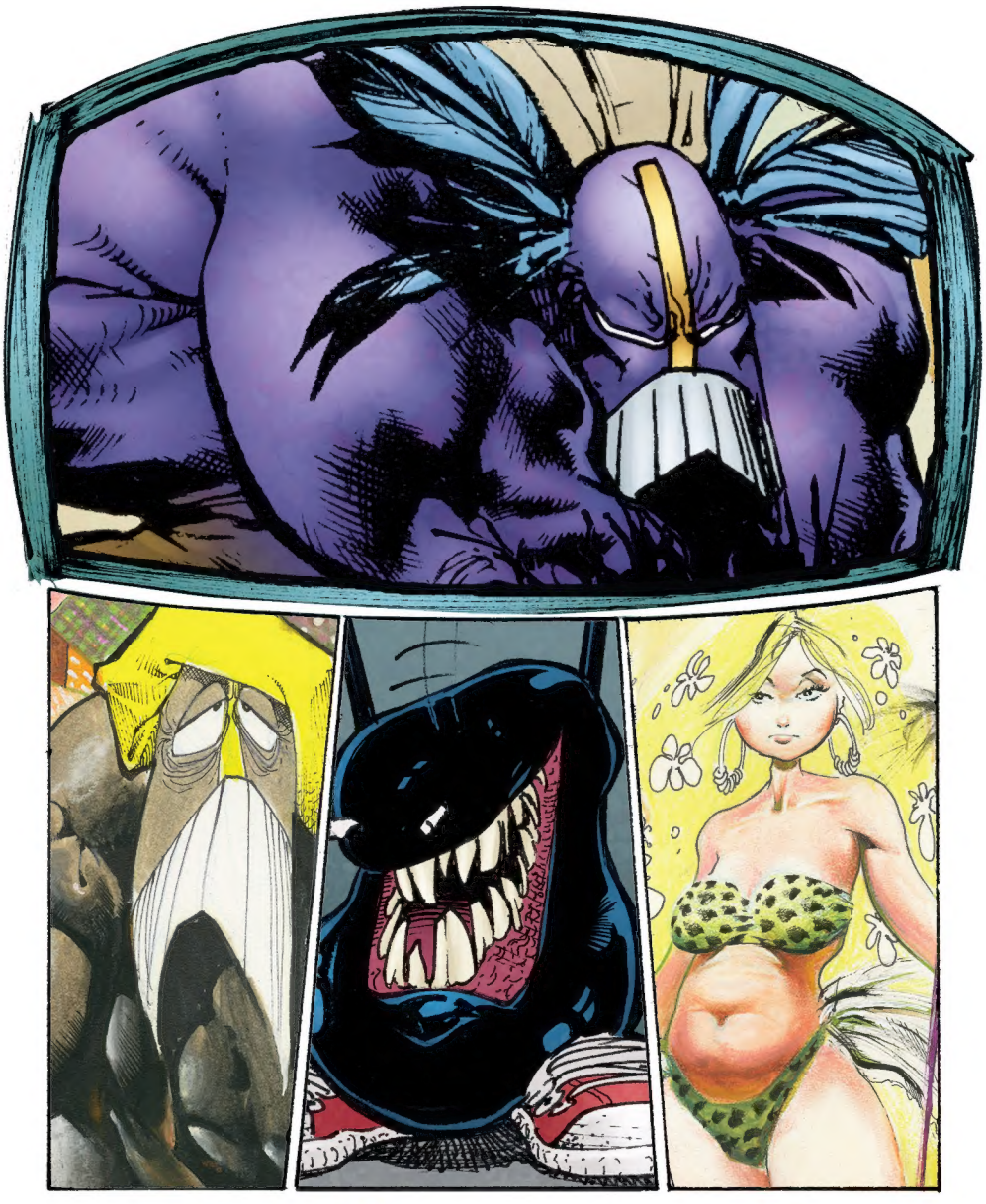
THE MAXX

maxximized

Sam Kieth • William Messner-Loebs



THE MAXX

Maximized

Sam Kieth

William Messner-Loebs

The Maxx
created by
Sam Kieth

Written by
Sam Kieth
(Story)

and

William
Messner-Loebs
(Script)

Artwork by
Sam Kieth

Finishes by
Jim Sinclair

Colors by
Ronda Pattison

Letters by
Mike Heisler

Series Editor
Scott Dunbier

Series Assistant Editor
Michael Benedetto

Cover by
Sam Kieth

Collection Edits by
Justin Eisinger and
Alonzo Simon

Collection Design by
Chris Mowry

ISBN: 978-1-63140-323-1 18 17 16 15 1 2 3 4

THE MAXX: MAXXIMIZED, VOLUME 4. JULY 2015. FIRST PRINTING. THE MAXX is ™ & © 2015 Sam Kieth. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. © 2015 Idea and Design Works, LLC. The IDW logo is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. IDW Publishing, a division of Idea and Design Works, LLC. Editorial offices: 2765 Truxtun Road, San Diego, CA 92106. Any similarities to persons living or dead are purely coincidental. With the exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of Idea and Design Works, LLC. Printed in Korea.
IDW Publishing does not read or accept unsolicited submissions of ideas, stories, or artwork.

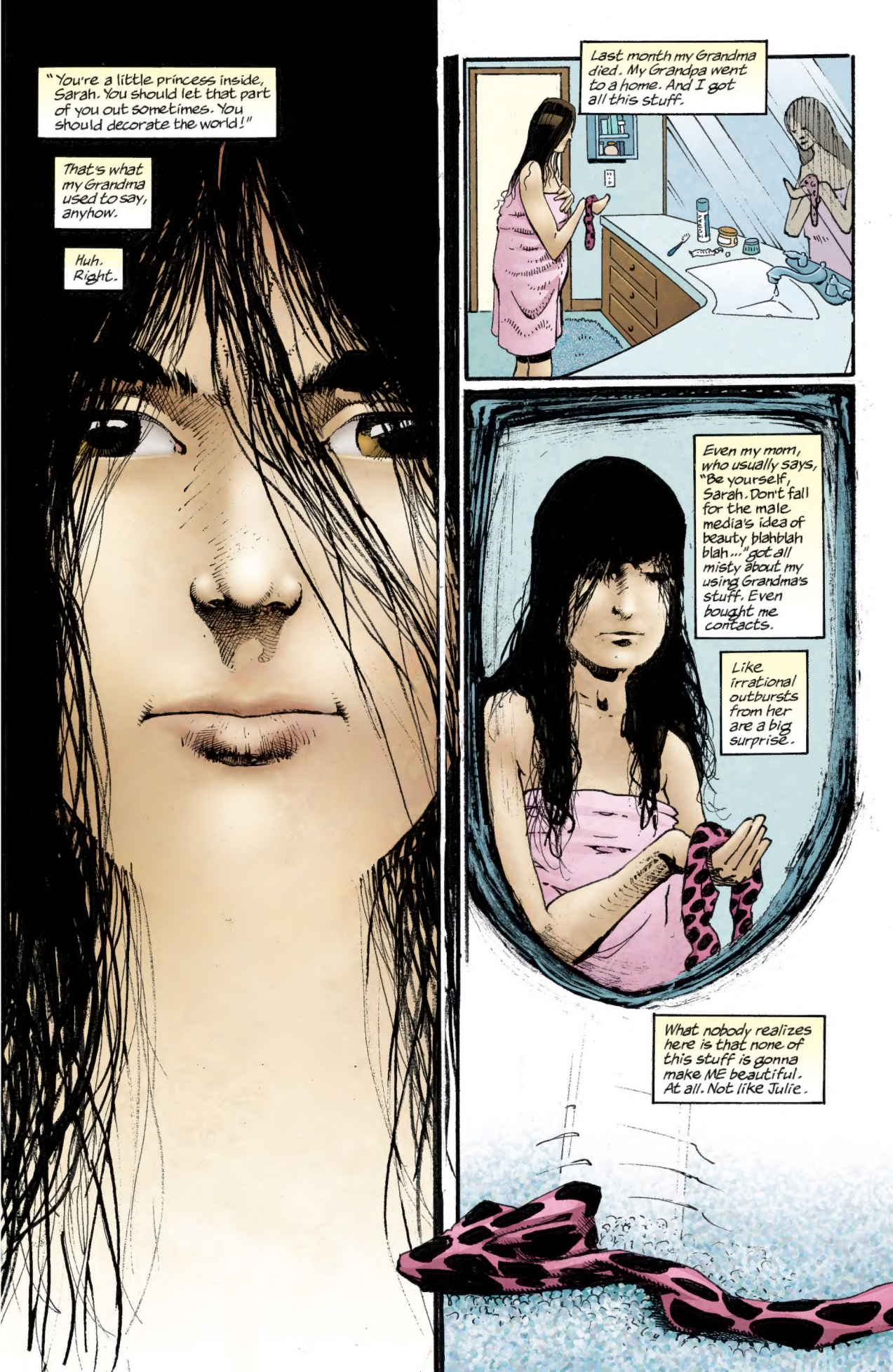
Originally published as THE MAXX: MAXXIMIZED issues #13–18.

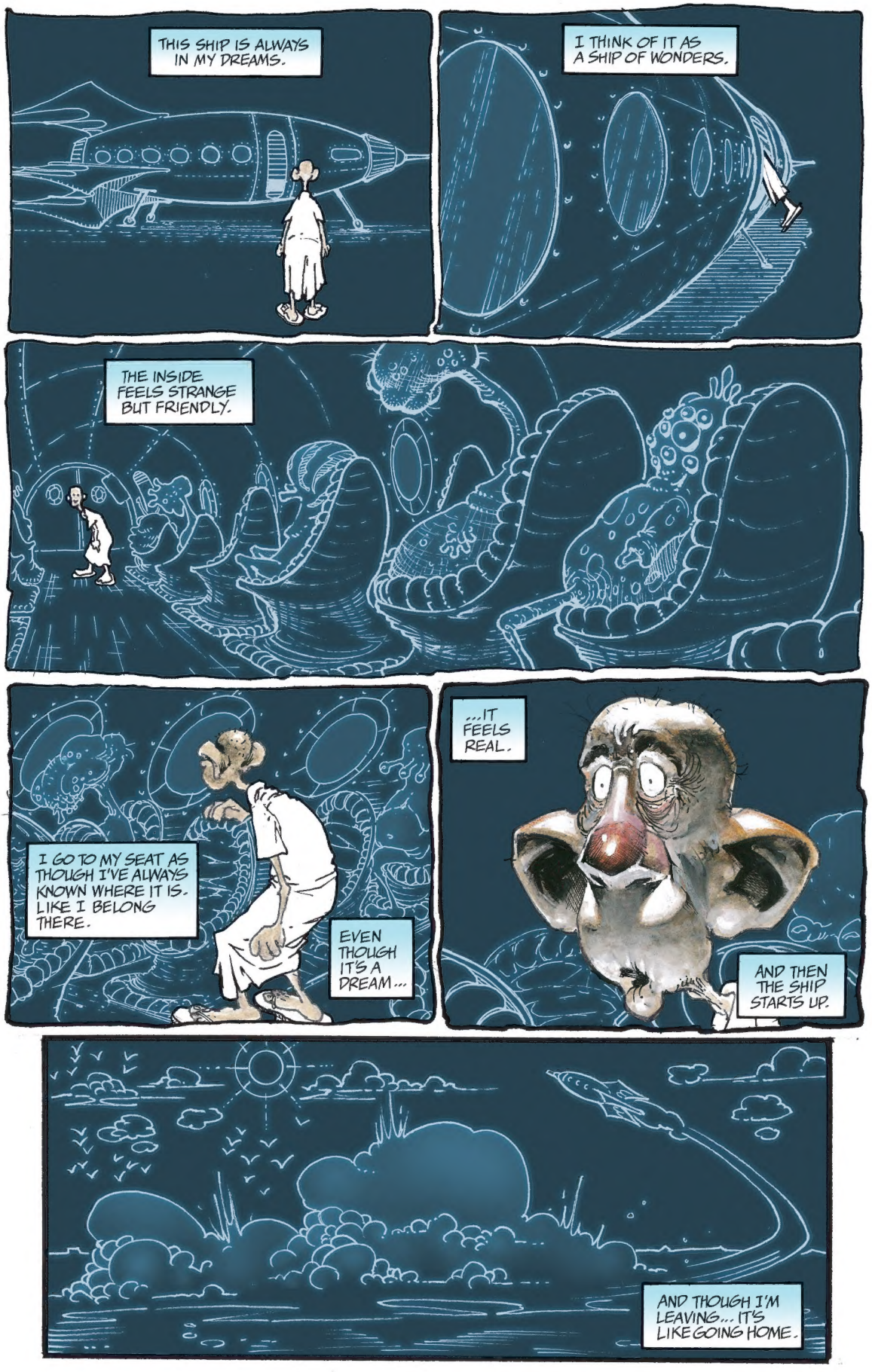
IDW®
www.IDWPUBLISHING.com
IDW founded by Ted Adams, Alex Garner, Kris Oprisko, and Robbie Robbins

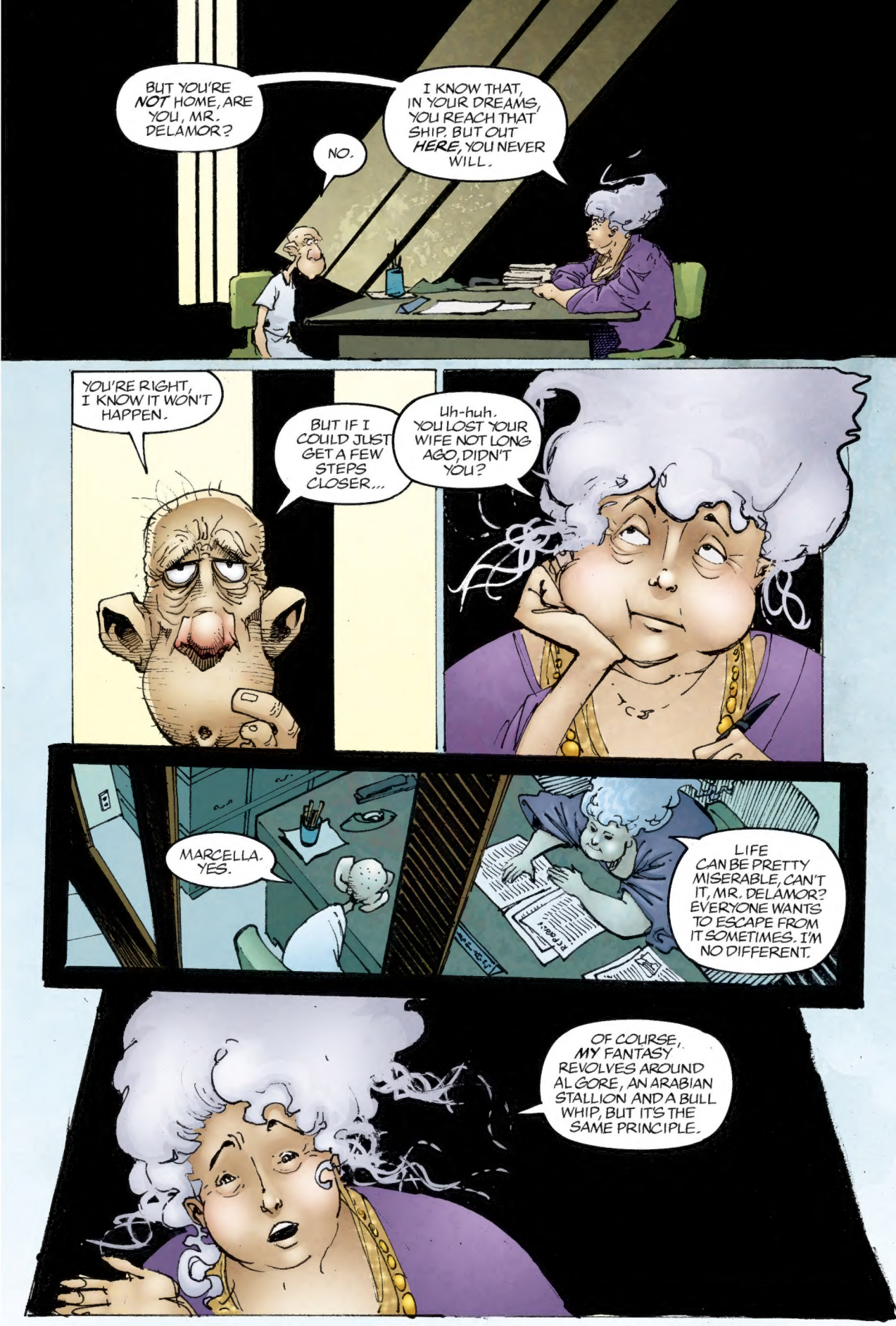
Ted Adams, CEO & Publisher
Greg Goldstein, President & COO
Robbie Robbins, EVP/Sr. Graphic Artist
Chris Ryall, Chief Creative Officer/Editor-in-Chief
Matthew Ruzicka, CPA, Chief Financial Officer
Alan Payne, VP of Sales
Dirk Wood, VP of Marketing
Lorelei Bunjes, VP of Digital Services

Facebook: **facebook.com/idwpublishing**
Twitter: **@idwpublishing**
YouTube: **youtube.com/idwpublishing**
Tumblr: **tumblr.idwpublishing.com**
Instagram: **instagram.com/idwpublishing**

Chapter One
MAX


"You're a little princess inside, Sarah. You should let that part of you out sometimes. You should decorate the world!"
That's what my Grandma used to say, anyhow.
Huh. Right.
Last month my Grandma died. My Grandpa went to a home. And I got all this stuff.
Even my mom, who usually says, "Be yourself, Sarah. Don't fall for the male media's idea of beauty blahblah blah..." got all misty about my using Grandma's stuff. Even bought me contacts.
Like irrational outbursts from her are a big surprise.
What nobody realizes here is that none of this stuff is gonna make ME beautiful. At all. Not like Julie.


THIS SHIP IS ALWAYS IN MY DREAMS.
I THINK OF IT AS A SHIP OF WONDERS.
THE INSIDE FEELS STRANGE BUT FRIENDLY.
I GO TO MY SEAT AS THOUGH I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN WHERE IT IS. LIKE I BELONG THERE.
EVEN THOUGH IT'S A DREAM...
...IT FEELS REAL.
AND THEN THE SHIP STARTS UP.
AND THOUGH I'M LEAVING... IT'S LIKE GOING HOME.


BUT YOU'RE NOT HOME, ARE YOU, MR. DELAMOR?
NO.
I KNOW THAT, IN YOUR DREAMS, YOU REACH THAT SHIP. BUT OUT HERE, YOU NEVER WILL.
YOU'RE RIGHT, I KNOW IT WON'T HAPPEN.
BUT IF I COULD JUST GET A FEW STEPS CLOSER...
Uh-huh. YOU LOST YOUR WIFE NOT LONG AGO, DIDN'T YOU?
MARCELLA. YES.
LIFE CAN BE PRETTY MISERABLE, CAN'T IT, MR. DELAMOR? EVERYONE WANTS TO ESCAPE FROM IT SOMETIMES. I'M NO DIFFERENT.
OF COURSE, MY FANTASY REVOLVES AROUND AL GORE, AN ARABIAN STALLION AND A BULL WHIP, BUT IT'S THE SAME PRINCIPLE.

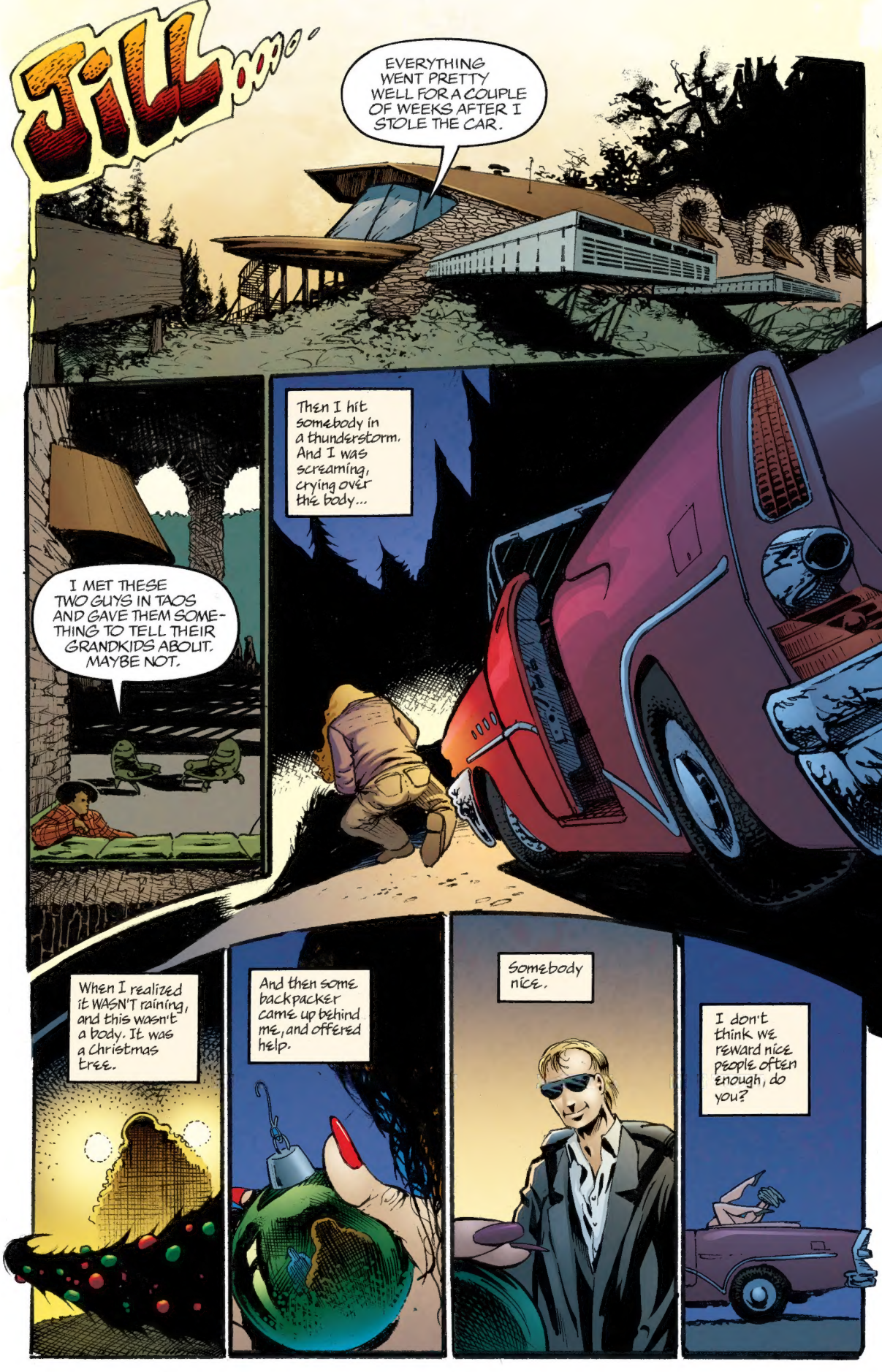
I THINK *YOU* THINK IF YOU'RE NUTS THAT YOU WON'T HAVE TO LEAVE. THAT YOU'LL BE SAFE.

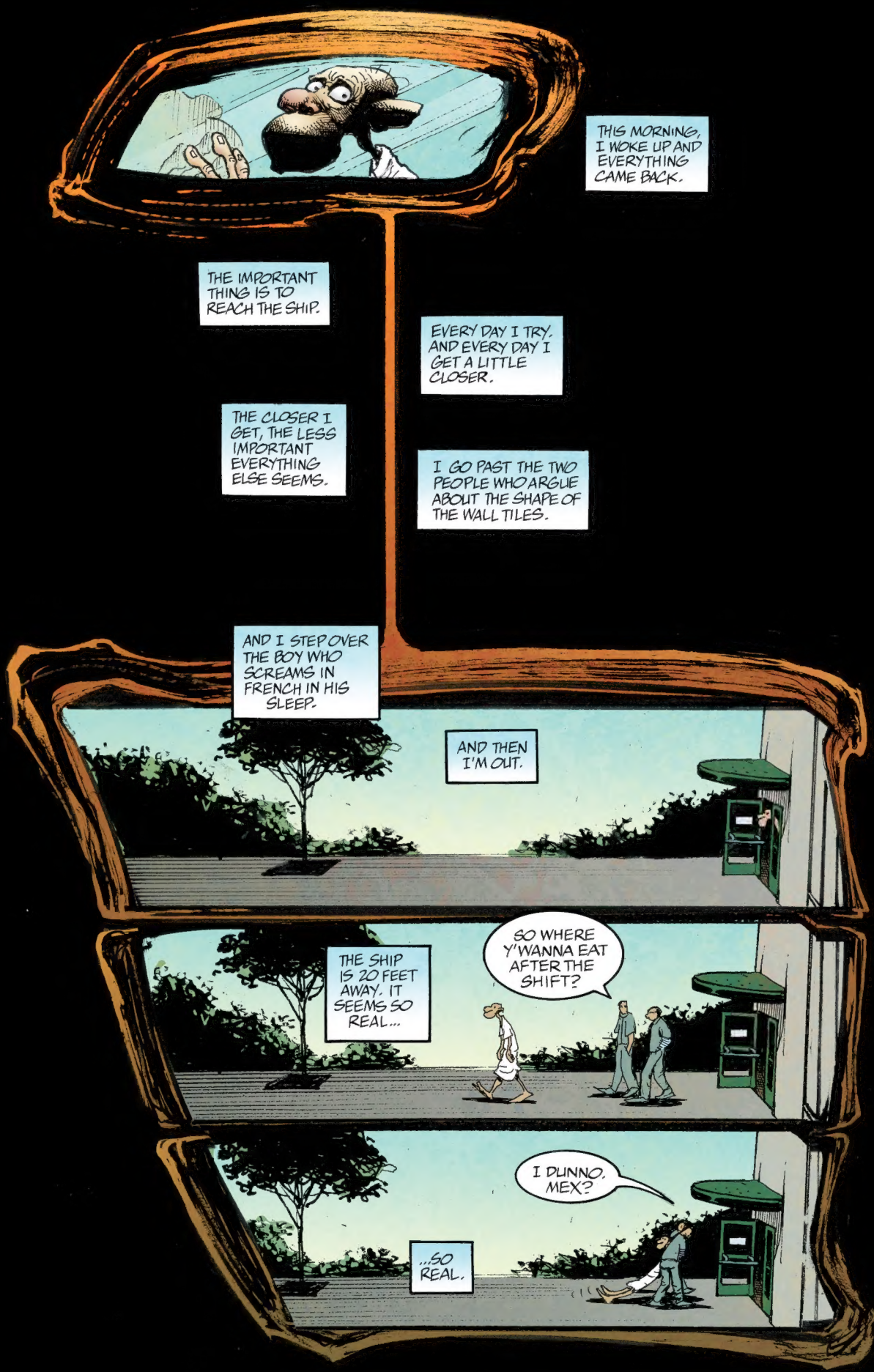
BUT YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DECIDE WHEN YOU HAVE TO LEAVE.

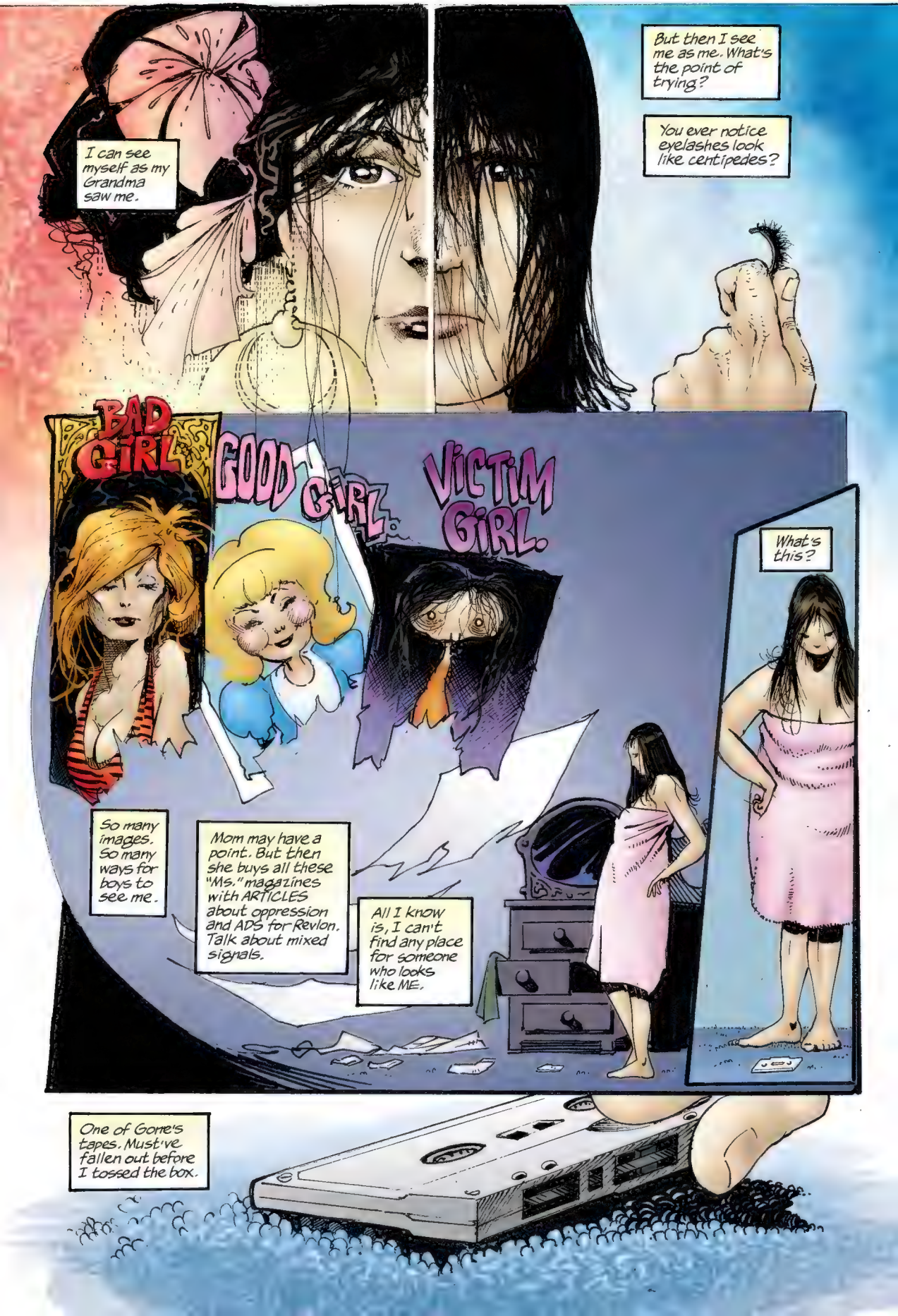
I'M SORRY, YOU'RE RIGHT... I KNOW, I KNOW...

I'M NOT SAYING YOU'RE LYING. I THINK YOU HONESTLY SEE RECYCLED 1950'S HORROR FLICKS RUNNING THROUGH YOUR HEAD, AND SO YOU THINK YOU STILL NEED TO BE HERE. BUT YOU DON'T. EVERYBODY HAS A MOVIE IN THEIR HEAD.

NO, I DON'T THINK YOU *DO*, OR YOU WOULDN'T STILL BE CHASING SPACESHIPS.

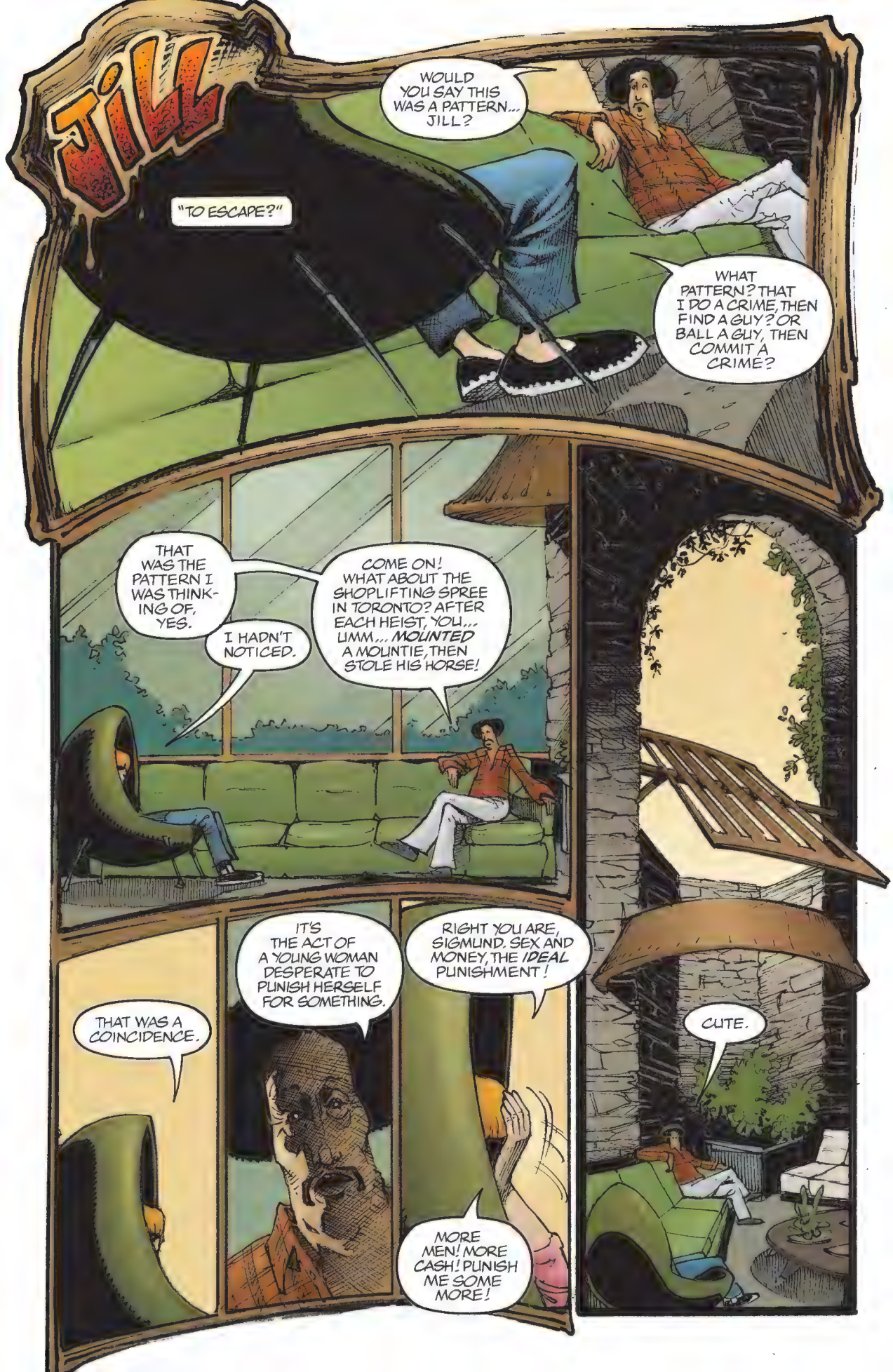

JILL
EVERYTHING WENT PRETTY WELL FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS AFTER I STOLE THE CAR.
I MET THESE TWO GUYS IN TAOS AND GAVE THEM SOMETHING TO TELL THEIR GRANDKIDS ABOUT. MAYBE NOT.
Then I hit somebody in a thunderstorm. And I was screaming, crying over the body...
When I realized it WASN'T raining, and this wasn't a body. It was a Christmas tree.
And then some backpacker came up behind me, and offered help.
Somebody nice.
I don't think we reward nice people often enough, do you?

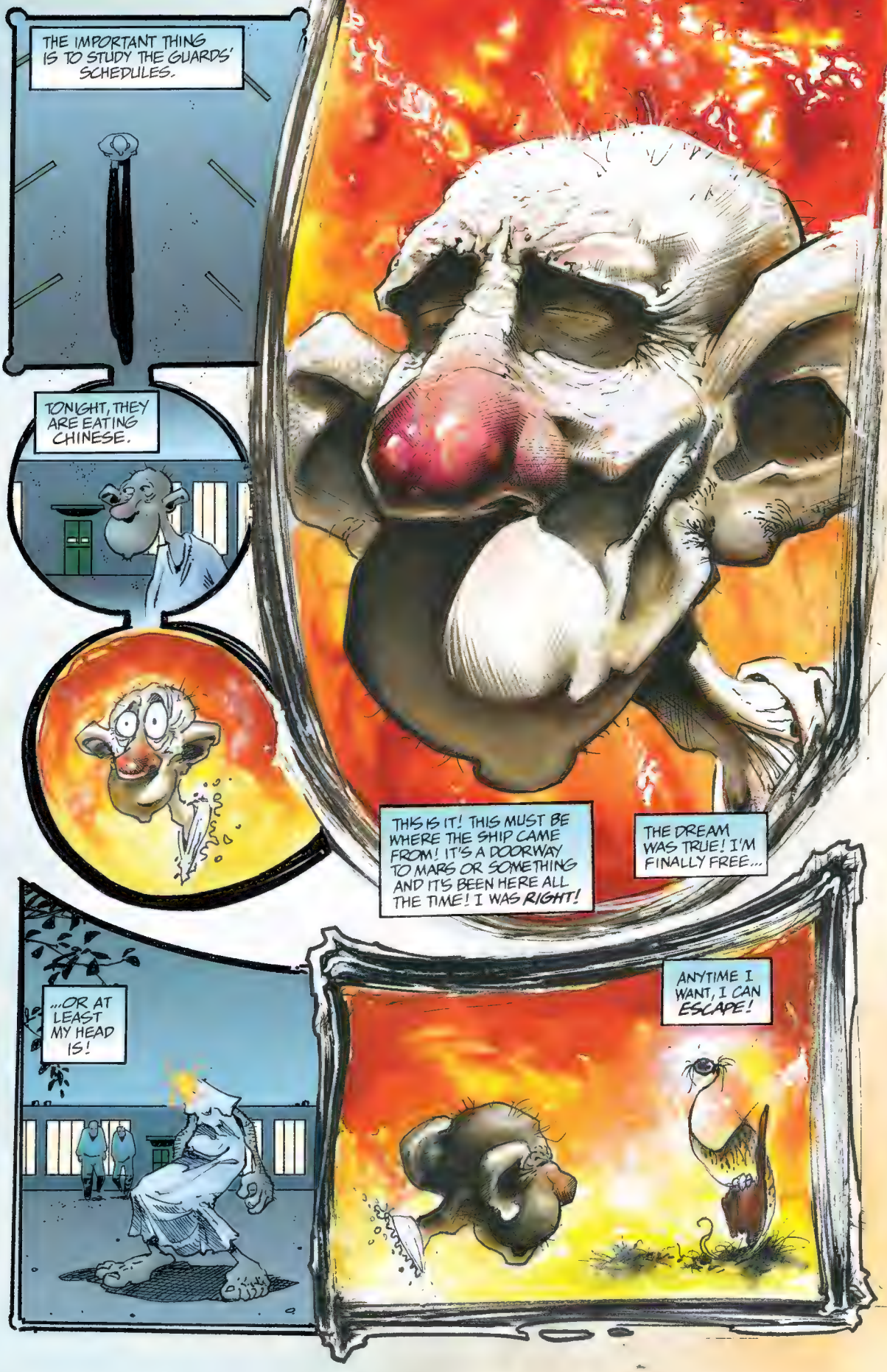

THIS MORNING, I WOKE UP AND EVERYTHING CAME BACK.
THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO REACH THE SHIP.
EVERY DAY I TRY, AND EVERY DAY I GET A LITTLE CLOSER.
THE CLOSER I GET, THE LESS IMPORTANT EVERYTHING ELSE SEEMS.
I GO PAST THE TWO PEOPLE WHO ARGUE ABOUT THE SHAPE OF THE WALL TILES.
AND I STEP OVER THE BOY WHO SCREAMS IN FRENCH IN HIS SLEEP.
AND THEN I'M OUT.
THE SHIP IS 20 FEET AWAY. IT SEEMS SO REAL...
SO WHERE Y'WANNA EAT AFTER THE SHIFT?
I DUNNO, MEX?
...SO REAL.

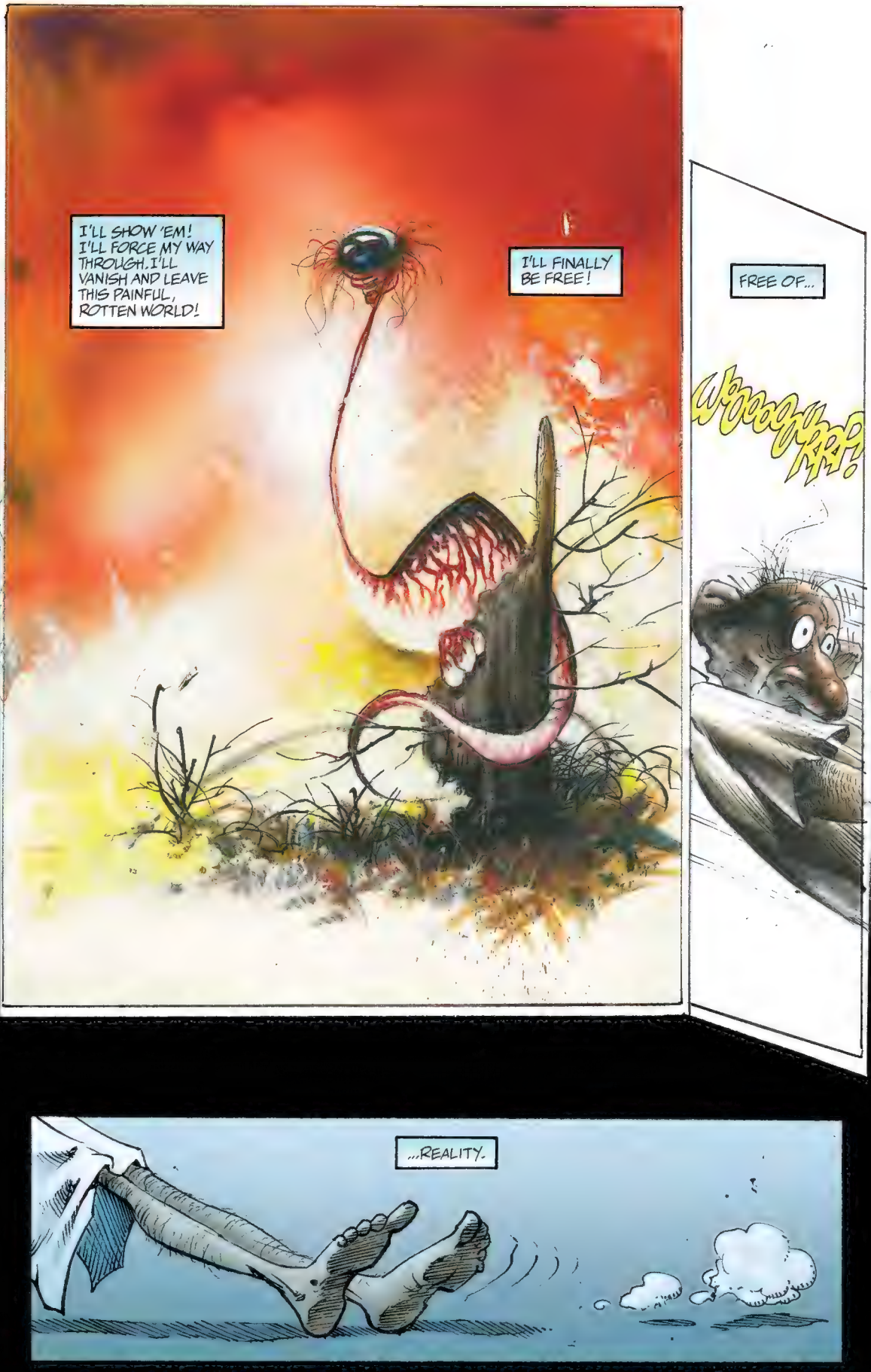

I can see myself as my Grandma saw me.
But then I see me as me. What's the point of trying?
You ever notice eyelashes look like centipedes?
BAD GIRL
GOOD GIRL
VICTIM GIRL
What's this?
So many images. So many ways for boys to see me.
Mom may have a point. But then she buys all these "Ms." magazines with ARTICLES about oppression and ADS for Revlon. Talk about mixed signals.
All I know is, I can't find any place for someone who looks like ME.
One of Gone's tapes. Must've fallen out before I tossed the box.

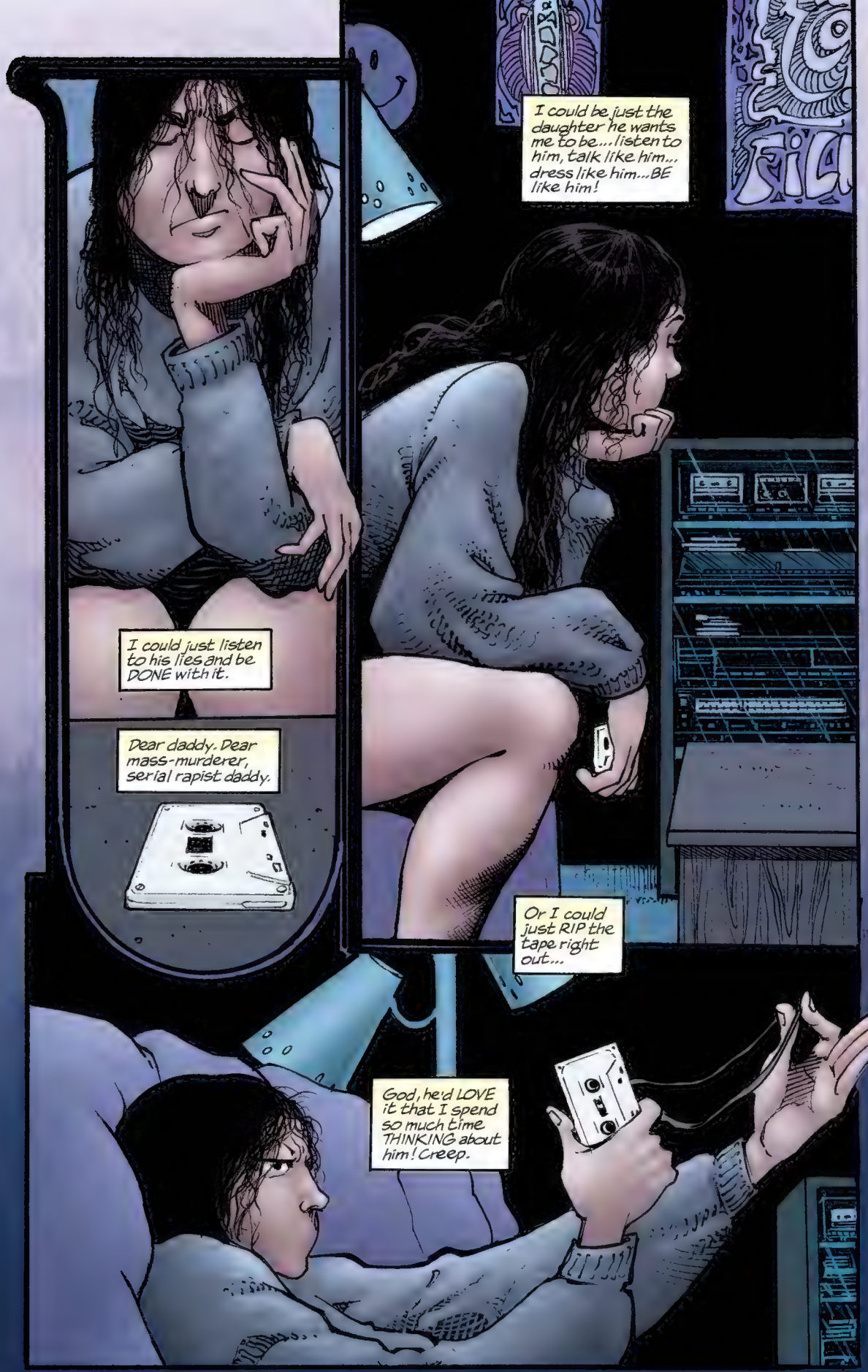
NO, MRS. JAMES. YOUR FATHER IS FINE. HE'S MAKING GREAT PROGRESS.
I JUST FEEL...SO GRODY, Y'KNOW. I FEEL LIKE I SOLD HIM OUT.
I SPENT MY LIFE TRYING TO REBEL AGAINST MOM. NOW SHE'S GONE.
PLEASE KNOK!
CALL MOON CHILD
I JUST CAN'T LOOK AFTER HIM AND SARAH TOO.
PERFECTLY UNDERSTANDABLE. BUT REMEMBER, HE'S THE ONE WHO CHECKED HIMSELF IN. NOBODY BLAMES YOU.

I MISS MY DAUGHTER.
I TRIED TO EXPLAIN, BUT SHE JUST KEPT CRYING.
JUST ANOTHER TEN FEET...
PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT
BUS STOP
SO HOW 'BOUT THAI?
WHAT'S "THAI"?
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I SAW GRAMPS. FOR ALL I REMEMBER, HE COULD LOOK LIKE THAT OLD GUY.
GOD, NURSING HOMES SUCK. MOM SAYS IT WAS GRANDPA'S IDEA. RIGHT.
GET REAL. WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO ENTER A NURSING HOME?


JILL
"TO ESCAPE?"
WOULD YOU SAY THIS WAS A PATTERN... JILL?
WHAT PATTERN? THAT I DO A CRIME, THEN FIND A GUY? OR BALL A GUY, THEN COMMIT A CRIME?
THAT WAS THE PATTERN I WAS THINKING OF, YES.
I HADN'T NOTICED.
COME ON! WHAT ABOUT THE SHOPLIFTING SPREE IN TORONTO? AFTER EACH HEIST, YOU... UMM... MOUNTED A MOUNTIE, THEN STOLE HIS HORSE!
CUTE.
THAT WAS A COINCIDENCE.
IT'S THE ACT OF A YOUNG WOMAN DESPERATE TO PUNISH HERSELF FOR SOMETHING.
RIGHT YOU ARE, SIGMUND. SEX AND MONEY, THE IDEAL PUNISHMENT!
MORE MEN! MORE CASH! PUNISH ME SOME MORE!

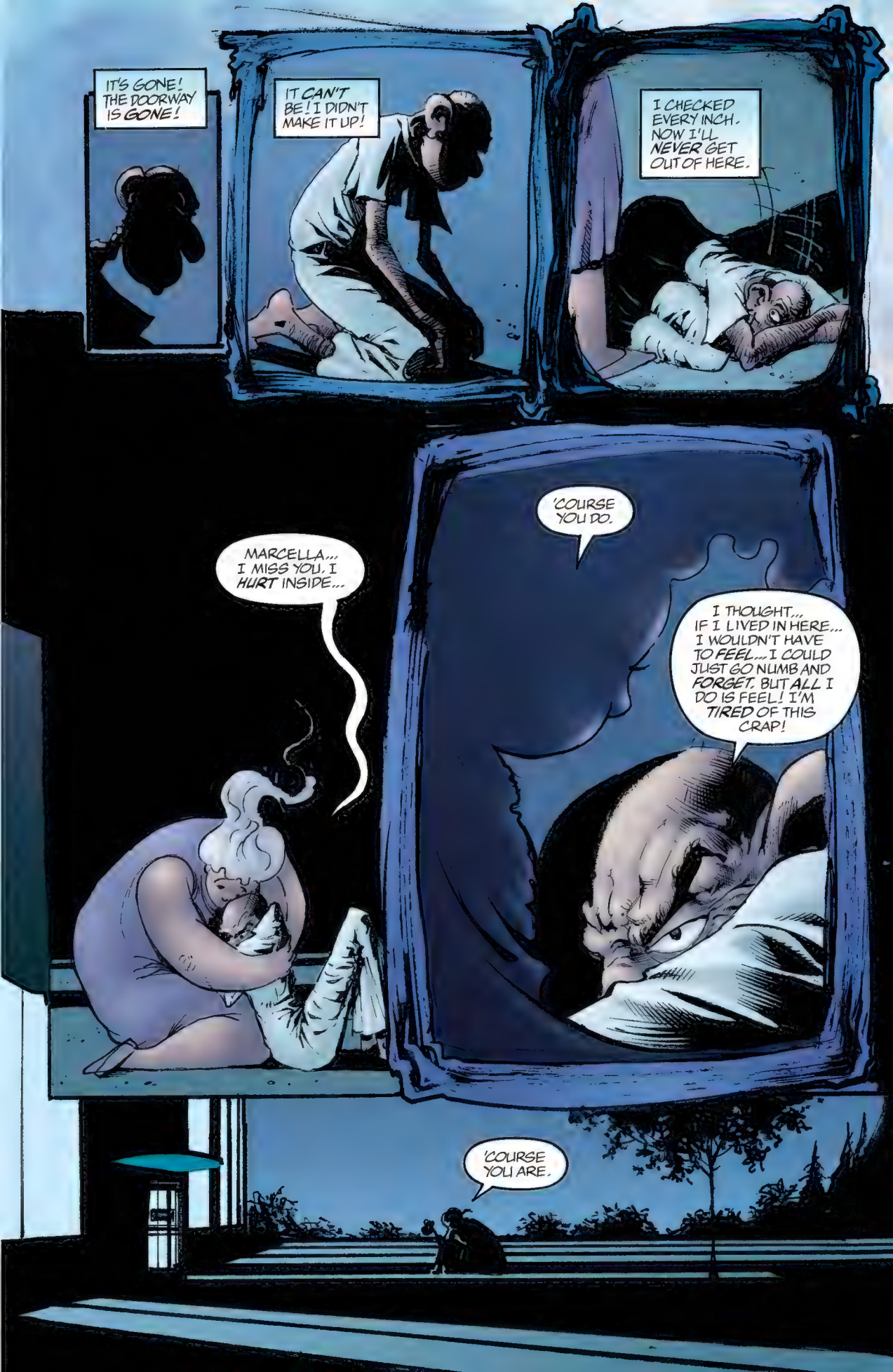

THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO STUDY THE GUARDS' SCHEDULES.
TONIGHT, THEY ARE EATING CHINESE.
THIS IS IT! THIS MUST BE WHERE THE SHIP CAME FROM! IT'S A DOORWAY TO MARS OR SOMETHING AND IT'S BEEN HERE ALL THE TIME! I WAS RIGHT!
THE DREAM WAS TRUE! I'M FINALLY FREE...
ANYTIME I WANT, I CAN ESCAPE!
...OR AT LEAST MY HEAD IS!


I'LL SHOW 'EM! I'LL FORCE MY WAY THROUGH. I'LL VANISH AND LEAVE THIS PAINFUL, ROTTEN WORLD!
I'LL FINALLY BE FREE!
FREE OF...
WOOOOKRR!
...REALITY.


I could be just the daughter he wants me to be... listen to him, talk like him... dress like him... BE like him!
I could just listen to his lies and be DONE with it.
Dear daddy. Dear mass-murderer, serial rapist daddy.
Or I could just RIP the tape right out...
God, he'd LOVE it that I spend so much time THINKING about him! Creep.

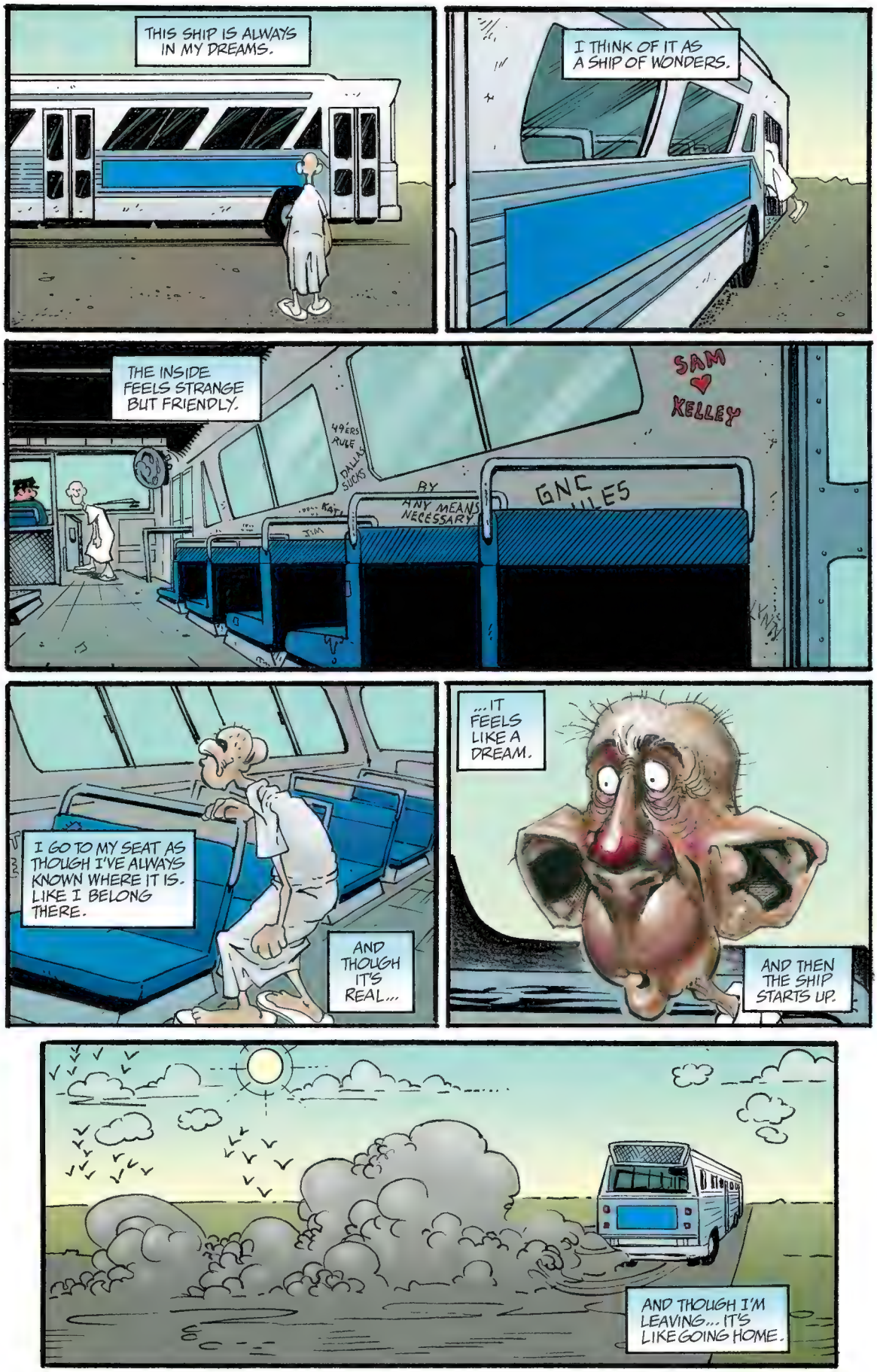
He's like the ULTIMATE man... he not only decides how women should dress...
How they should wear their hair...
He decides if they should live or DIE!
God. It's like living in the world's STUPIDEST after school special.
"My dad--he kills people. How I came to UNDERSTAND him!"
I hate this... I just HATE it!
My mom thinks I'm just a burden! My best friend leaves town.
BONK
The only one who really cares about me... is HIM!
God. Don't let me be like him!
Don't let his craziness be in me!

AT LAST! THE GUARDS ARE GONE!
I'VE WAITED ALL DAY, BUT I CAN FINALLY SLIP THROUGH THAT WINDOW INTO THE OTHER WORLD...
IT'S EXACTLY 14 PACES!
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-
10-11-12-13-14-
15-16...
NO!


IT'S GONE! THE DOORWAY IS GONE!
IT CAN'T BE! I DIDN'T MAKE IT UP!
I CHECKED EVERY INCH. NOW I'LL NEVER GET OUT OF HERE.
'COURSE YOU DO.
I THOUGHT... IF I LIVED IN HERE... I WOULDN'T HAVE TO FEEL... I COULD JUST GO NUMB AND FORGET. BUT ALL I DO IS FEEL! I'M TIRED OF THIS CRAP!
MARCELLA... I MISS YOU. I HURT INSIDE...
'COURSE YOU ARE.

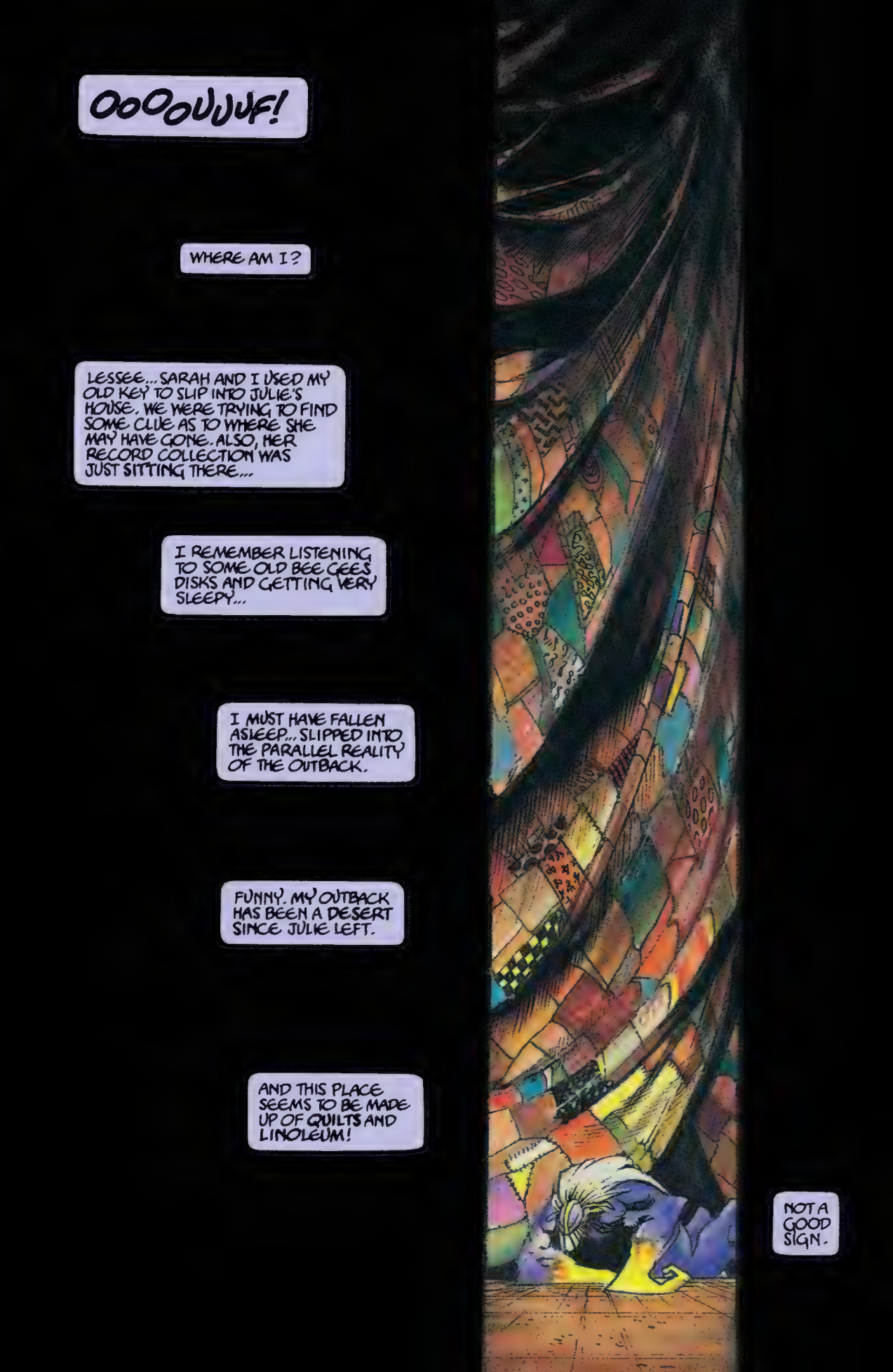
THE BUS IS HERE.
I KNOW. I HAD THE ORDERLY PUT YOUR BAGS ON BOARD.
HE GAVE YOU SOME BURRITOS AND EGG ROLLS FOR THE TRIP.
GOOD.
YOU'VE BEEN A FRIEND.
WRITE ME WHEN YOU GET TO MARS.
NOT REALLY. SHE WOULD HAVE WANTED TO BE ALIVE.
MARCELLA IS ON MARS. I'M STAYING HERE FOR A WHILE.
EMMET? MARCELLA WOULD HAVE WANTED IT THIS WAY.

I hate it.
I hate it.
I look like a Goddamn BUNNY.
Nope, this is not the way I'm gonna decorate the world. Grandma could do this. I can't.
The contacts hurt. The eyelashes tickle.
I feel like a stranger. A total stranger.
SIGH I guess the world is stuck with the same ol' Sarah.


THIS SHIP IS ALWAYS IN MY DREAMS.
I THINK OF IT AS A SHIP OF WONDERS.
THE INSIDE FEELS STRANGE BUT FRIENDLY.
SAM ♥ KELLEY
49ERS RULE
DALLAS SUCKS
BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY
I GO TO MY SEAT AS THOUGH I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN WHERE IT IS. LIKE I BELONG THERE.
AND THOUGH IT'S REAL...
...IT FEELS LIKE A DREAM.
AND THEN THE SHIP STARTS UP.
AND THOUGH I'M LEAVING... IT'S LIKE GOING HOME.

Chapter Two
THE MAXX

I STOLE SOME MORE FOOD FOR YOU, JASPER.
THANKS, LINC. AND THANKS FOR NOT TELLING. IF DAD FOUND OUT, HE'D WUP ME GOOD.
JEEZ, IT'S BEEN THREE WEEKS. I'D GIVE ANYTHING NOT TO HAVE MY HAND STUCK IN THIS STUPID DIMENSIONAL PORTAL THING.
ANYTHING? EVEN YOUR NEW BIKE WITH THE GLOW-IN-THE-DARK HANDLEBARS?
SURE. WHY?
¡AAAAAAA!


OOOOUUUF!
WHERE AM I?
LESSEE... SARAH AND I USED MY OLD KEY TO SLIP INTO JULIE'S HOUSE. WE WERE TRYING TO FIND SOME CLUE AS TO WHERE SHE MAY HAVE GONE. ALSO, HER RECORD COLLECTION WAS JUST SITTING THERE...
I REMEMBER LISTENING TO SOME OLD BEE GEES DISKS AND GETTING VERY SLEEPY...
I MUST HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP... SLIPPED INTO THE PARALLEL REALITY OF THE OUTBACK.
FUNNY. MY OUTBACK HAS BEEN A DESERT SINCE JULIE LEFT.
AND THIS PLACE SEEMS TO BE MADE UP OF QUILTS AND LINOLEUM!
NOT A GOOD SIGN.

OH, YEAH. LINOLEUM, QUILTS, AND HUGE PIPES MADE OF ALUMINUM.
MUSTN'T FORGET THE BIG PIPES!
AT LEAST I'M NOT TALKING OUT LOUD TO MYSELF YET. THAT'S GOOD.
THAT'S PROGRESS.
ACTUALLY, IF YOU SQUINT THEY LOOK JUST LIKE HUGE LAWN CHAIRS.
HAH?

STOP! THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY! I AM THE KING!
ONLY I CAN LOOT HERE... IN MY CHARMING AND ROGUISH WAY, OF COURSE!
THE KING?
YES, AND I'M HERE TO PROTECT THE PRINCESS FROM ALL INTERLOPERS!
ASM
SPLASH!
UH-OH, THE JOINT'S LEAKING! MUST'VE BEEN A PSYCHIC PENETRATION SOMEWHERE! A VIOLATION!
HOWEVER WILL I GET AWAY? I'LL DROWN! MY LEGS ARE TOO SHORT!

sigh ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! I'LL TAKE YOU!
UH, THANKS. COULD YOU NOT DENT MY LITTLE TIN BODY TOO?
SPLOOSH
SPLOOSH
SPLOOSH
LOOKIT, MR. DIAL-A-DOODLE! A BIG PURPLE TOY THAT TALKS TO ITSELVES!
HOW ORIGINATIBLE!
BITCH, BITCH, BITCH. SAY, DO YOU KNOW IF THOSE ARE REALLY LAWN CHAIRS?
PLLHPKH
YUSS!
I'M NOT A TOY! I'M... I'M...
AND I DON'T TALK TO MYSELF EITHER!
HEY! THE WATER'S GETTING DEEPER ON THE CEILING!

'COURSE IT IS! EVERY-THING'S BEEN TURNED UPSIDE DOWN!
YOU TELLS 'IM, MR. RUTABAGA-HEAD!
WE LOVES YOU, MR. TALKS-TO-ITSELF!
PUMPKIN
YUSS!
TAKES US WITH YOU!
OH, F'R...
I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT OTHER BOZO I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE CARRYING?
GEEZ, I HATE DREAM LOGIC!
IT... SMELLS LIKE... LIKE...
WHAT'S THAT?

...A HORSE.
A VERY
BIG...
THE WAGON! QUICK! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!
IF ALLEN FUNT COMES OUT NOW, I'M GONNA DIE!
OH, MAN!

THOSE SURE DO LOOK LIKE LAWN CHAIRS.
I WILL SAVE YOU, ALL MY SMALL FRIENDS!
I AM THE PROTECTOR OF THIS PLACE. I AM GOODNESS AND JUSTICE.
I AM THE MAXX!
OH, MAN. MY HEAD HURTS.
PUMPF
AND WE'LL *HELP!* MR. RUTABAGA-HEAD WILL PULL THE STRING ON MR. YAKITY-TAKITY SO HE CAN READ WHATS WRITTEN ON MR. DIAL-A-DOODLE AND WE'LL KNOW *WHERE* TO GO!

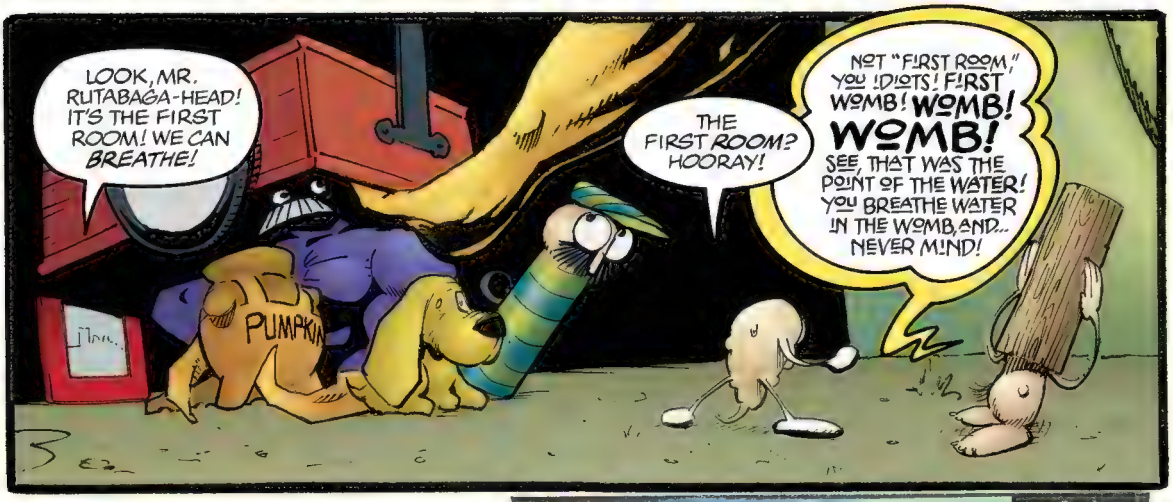
THERE IS NO NEED. THE MAXX KNOWS WHERE TO GO. WE MUST HURRY TO THE FIRST ROOM, BEFORE THE WATER SINKS ANY LOWER.
THE FIRST ROOM?
PLINK
YUSS. THE BEGINNINGS PLACE.

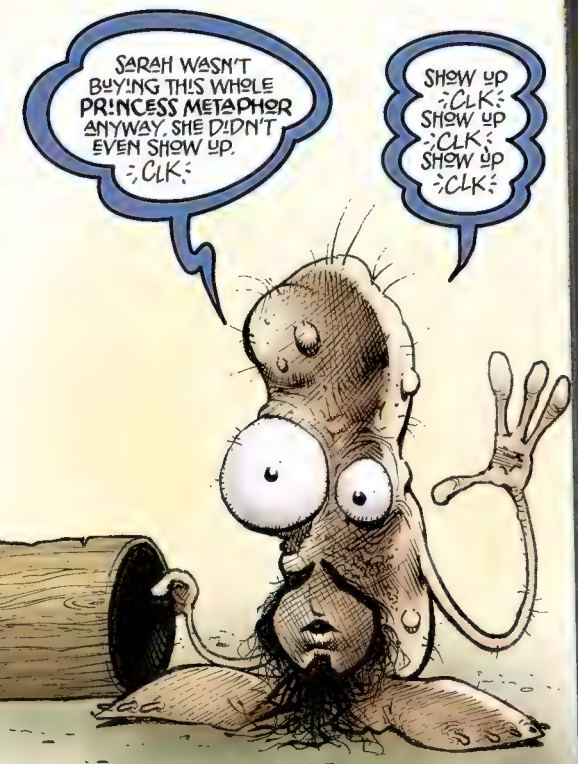
THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME! THE WATER IS FLOODING IN! EVERYBODY DOWN!
PUMPKIN!
THE MAXX WILL MAKE AN AIR SPACE FOR ALL HIS SMALL FRIENDS!
THE MAXX WILL PROTECT YOU WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH!
OUCHIE.

NOW I WILL FIGHT MY WAY ON TO VICTORY! MUST HOLD ON! CANNOT BLACK OUT!
KEEP RUNNING, MR. TALKS-TO-ITSELF, OR YOU'LL BE DROWNED AND CRUSHED!
PUMPKIN
YOU MAKE THAT SOUND LIKE A BAD THING.
OOPS, MR. RUTABAGA-HEAD IS GETTING AN UNHEALTHY ATTACHMENT TO MR. DIAL-A-DOODLE. BETTER PULL THEM APART!

AT LAST! WE CAN BREATHE WATER IN THE FIRST ROOM!
I MUST ENTER. I AM THE PROTECTOR! I...
HOLD IT, HORSE-BOY!
YEAH, YEAH! WELL, I'M THE KING, AND I SAY NOBODY GETS TO KNOW THE PRINCESS, EXCEPT ON MY SAY SO!
YOU WANNA BUY SOME LOVE? THREE BUCKS A BUSHEL!

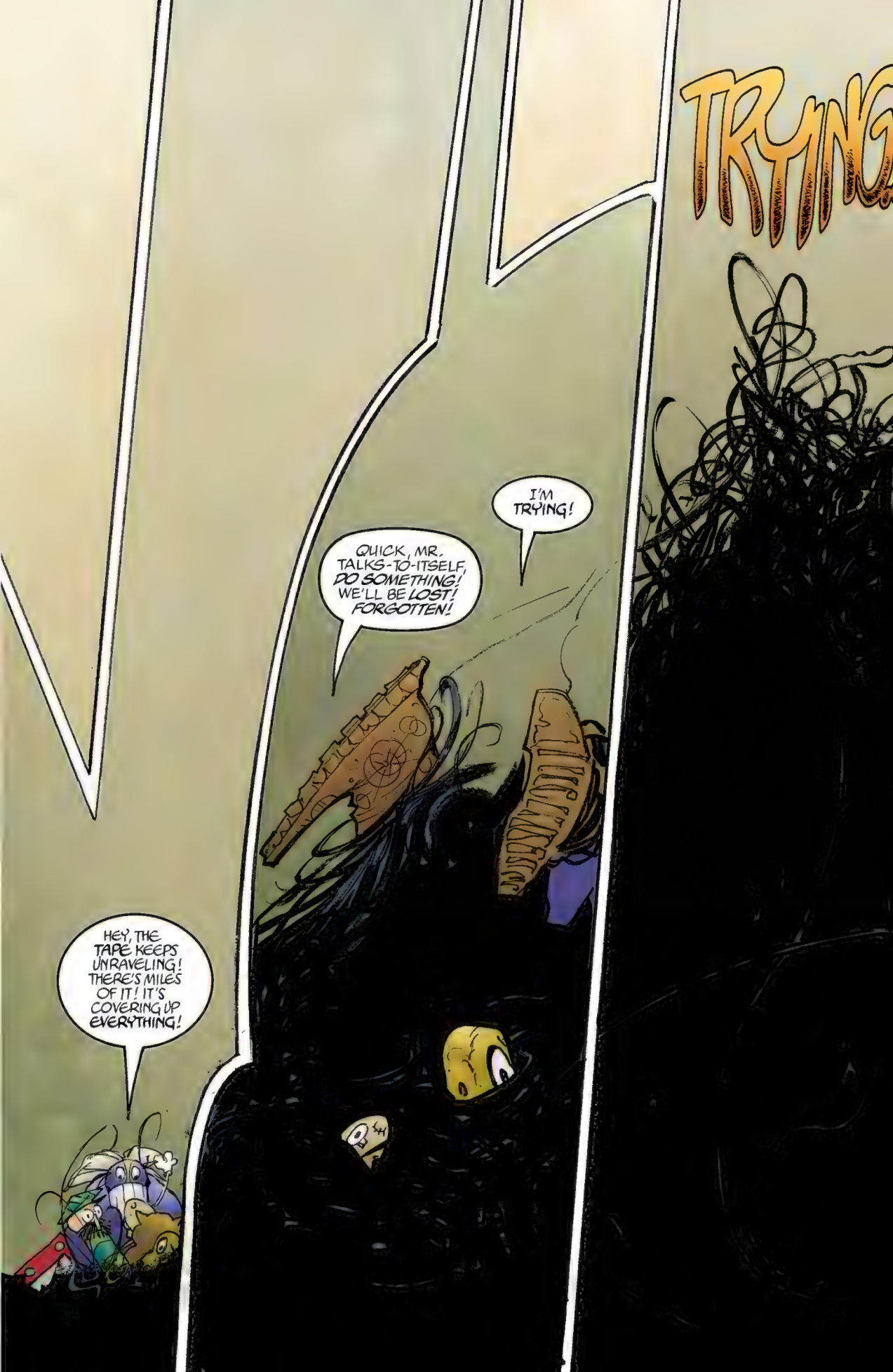
IT'S NOT COOL TO HALLUCINATE, SWEETIE. YOUR POPS IS AS DEAD AS JANIS!
LOOK, MUVVY! DADDY TALK TO HORSIE!

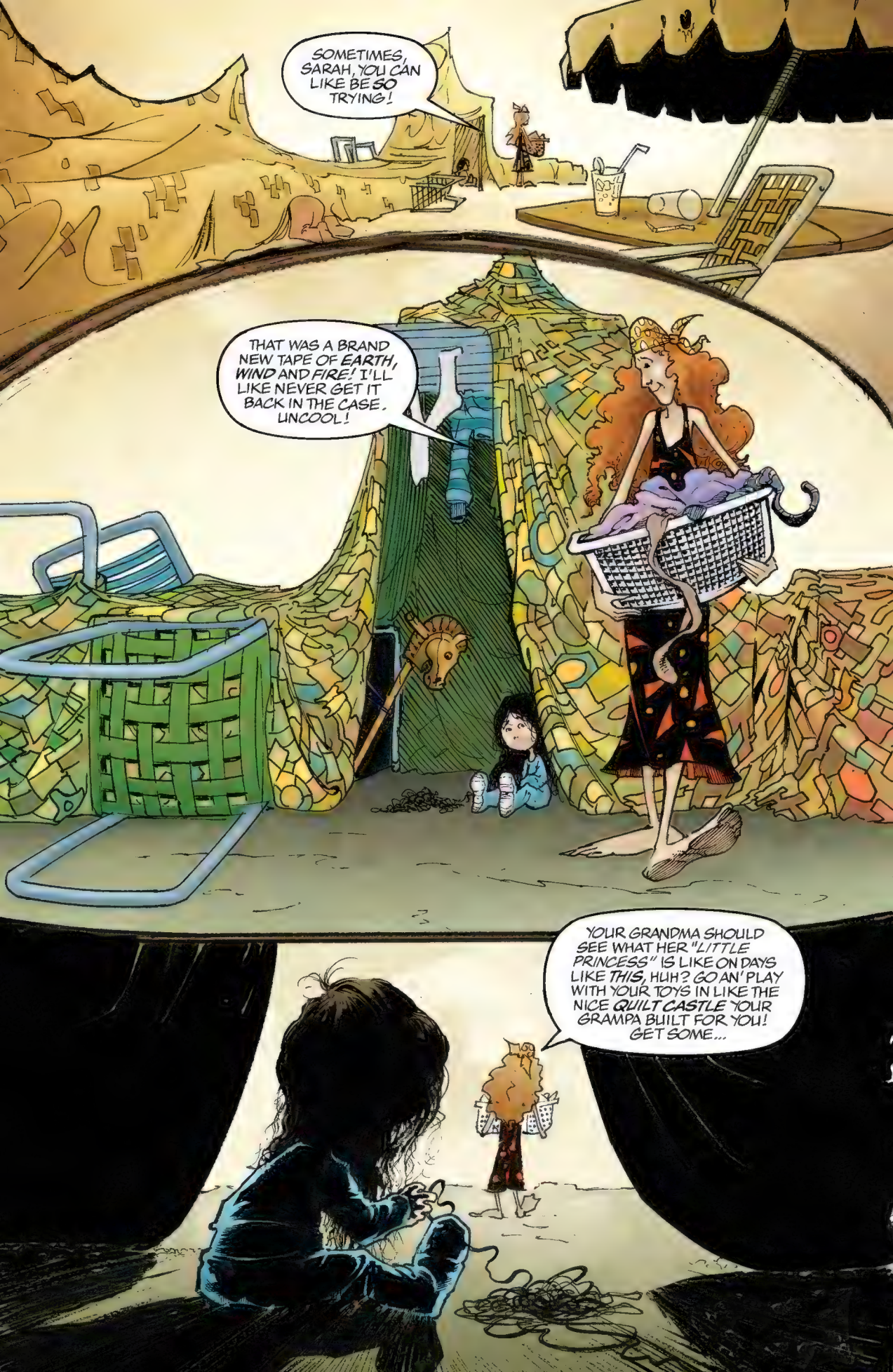

LOOK, MR. RUTABAGA-HEAD! IT'S THE FIRST ROOM! WE CAN BREATHE!
PUMPKIN
THE FIRST ROOM? HOORAY!
NOT "FIRST ROOM," YOU IDIOTS! FIRST WOMB! WOMB! WOMB! SEE, THAT WAS THE POINT OF THE WATER! YOU BREATHE WATER IN THE WOMB, AND... NEVER MIND!


SARAH WASN'T BUYING THIS WHOLE PRINCESS METAPHOR ANYWAY. SHE DIDN'T EVEN SHOW UP. :CLK:
SHOW UP :CLK: SHOW UP :CLK: SHOW UP :CLK:

LIKE THE REST OF THIS IS REAL!

HEY, THIS MR. GONE ISN'T REAL. IT'S JUST A TAPE CASSETTE!

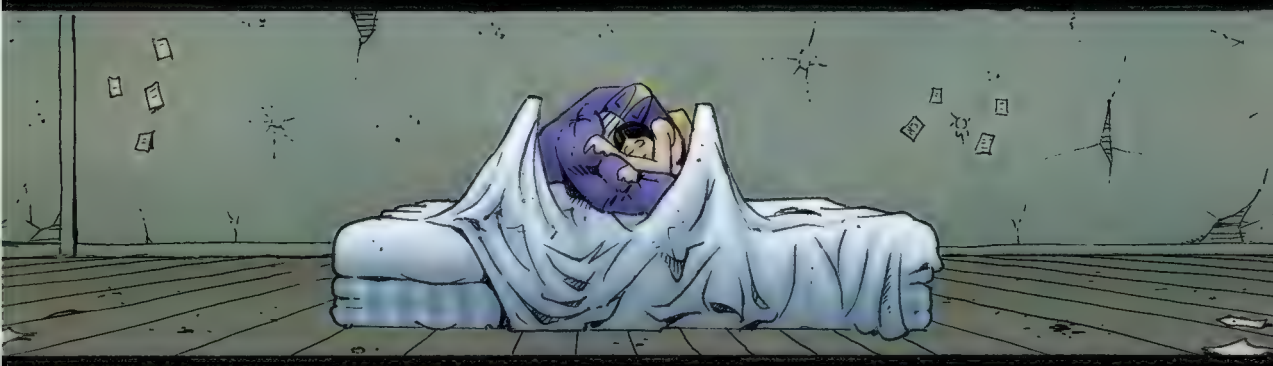

TRYING
I'M TRYING!
QUICK, MR. TALKS-TO-ITSELF, DO SOMETHING! WE'LL BE LOST! FORGOTTEN!
HEY, THE TAPE KEEPS UNRAVELING! THERE'S MILES OF IT! IT'S COVERING UP EVERYTHING!


SOMETIMES, SARAH, YOU CAN LIKE BE SO TRYING!
THAT WAS A BRAND NEW TAPE OF EARTH, WIND AND FIRE! I'LL LIKE NEVER GET IT BACK IN THE CASE. UNCOOL!
YOUR GRANDMA SHOULD SEE WHAT HER "LITTLE PRINCESS" IS LIKE ON DAYS LIKE THIS, HUH? GO AN' PLAY WITH YOUR TOYS IN LIKE THE NICE QUILT CASTLE YOUR GRAMPA BUILT FOR YOU! GET SOME...

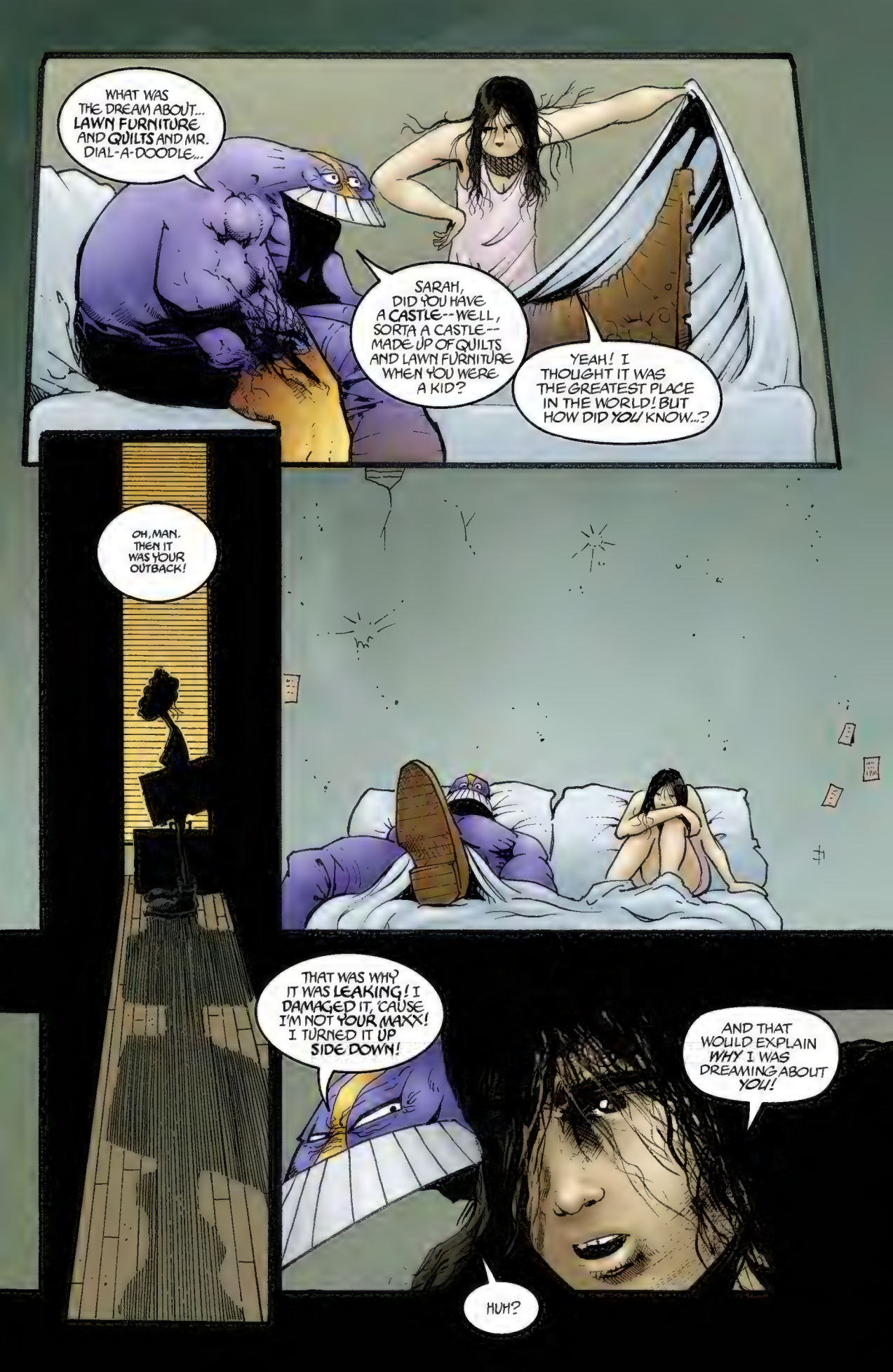
...SLEEP...

...SLEEP...

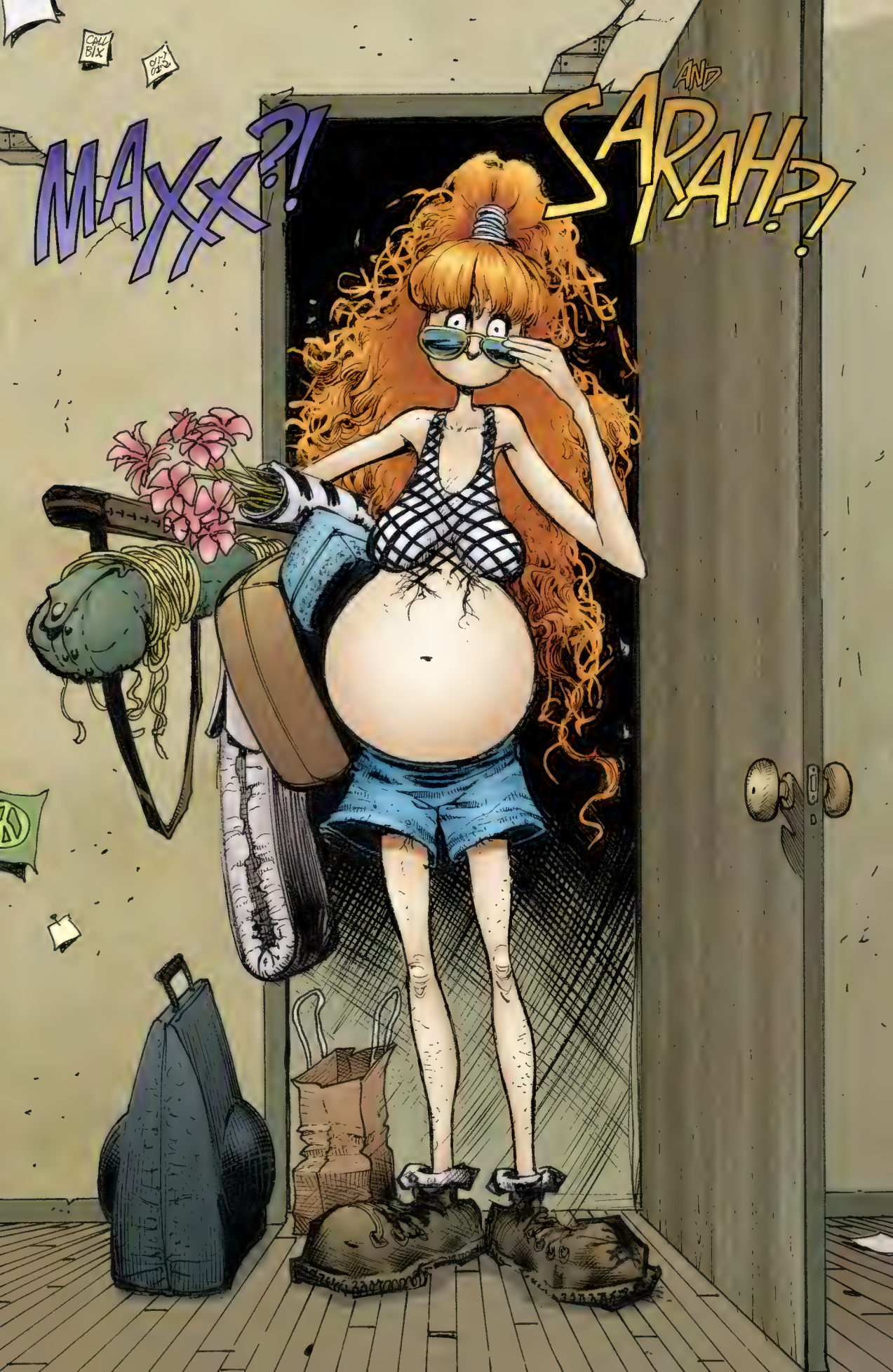
...SLEEP...



OH, HI, MAXX. I GUESS WE, UH, MUST'VE FALLEN ASLEEP...HUH?
HI, SARAH... UH, YEAH. YEAH. I GUESS WE DID.
ELO
OUT OF THE BLUE
PINK FLOYD
ANIMALS
EEW, GAWD. WHERE WAS MY HAND?
AFTER THAT BIZARRE OUTBACK DREAM, I CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED!
I CAN'T BELIEVE I WOULD'VE... NOT WITH SARAH! SHE'S WHAT...16? 17? I WOULD'VE REMEMBERED THAT!
I WONDER IF THERE'S SOME DIPLOMATIC WAY I CAN WASH MY HAND?

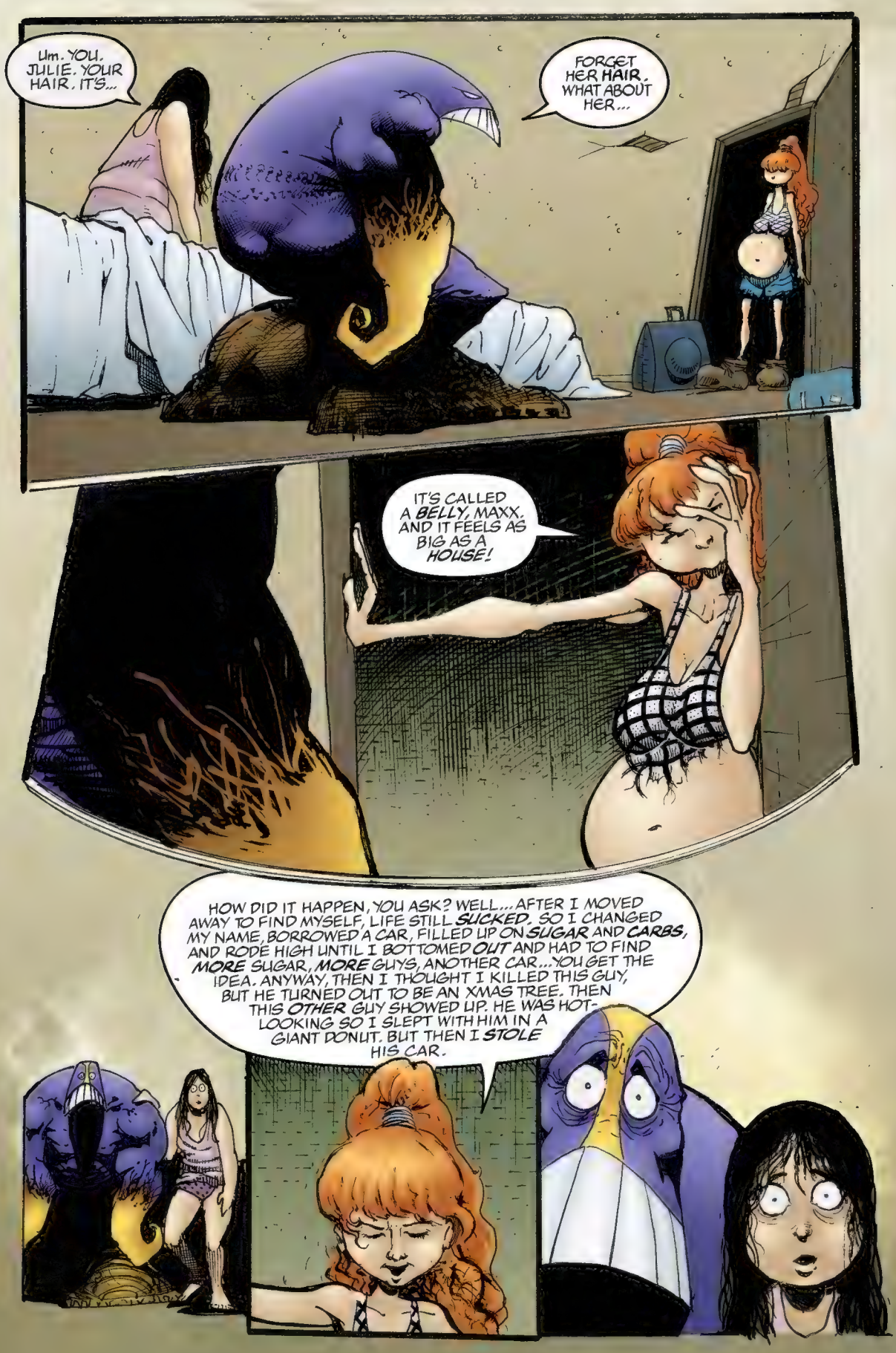

WHAT WAS THE DREAM ABOUT... LAWN FURNITURE AND QUILTS AND MR. DIAL-A-DOODLE...
SARAH, DID YOU HAVE A CASTLE--WELL, SORTA A CASTLE--MADE UP OF QUILTS AND LAWN FURNITURE WHEN YOU WERE A KID?
YEAH! I THOUGHT IT WAS THE GREATEST PLACE IN THE WORLD! BUT HOW DID YOU KNOW...?
OH, MAN. THEN IT WAS YOUR OUTBACK!
THAT WAS WHY IT WAS LEAKING! I DAMAGED IT, 'CAUSE I'M NOT YOUR MAXX! I TURNED IT UP SIDE DOWN!
AND THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY I WAS DREAMING ABOUT YOU!
HUH?

WELL, ABOUT YOUR PAST ANYWAY. WHO YOU WERE BEFORE YOU WERE THE MAXX.
MY... PAST?
OH, RIGHT. THAT'S YOUR SECRET IDENTITY AND STUFF. DON'T WORRY. I ALWAYS FORGET MY DREAMS.
NO, SARAH. YOU CAN'T FORGET! YOU HAVE TO TELL ME. WHO WAS I?
WELL, I...
CLIC
SNIC


MAXX?!
AND
SARAH?!

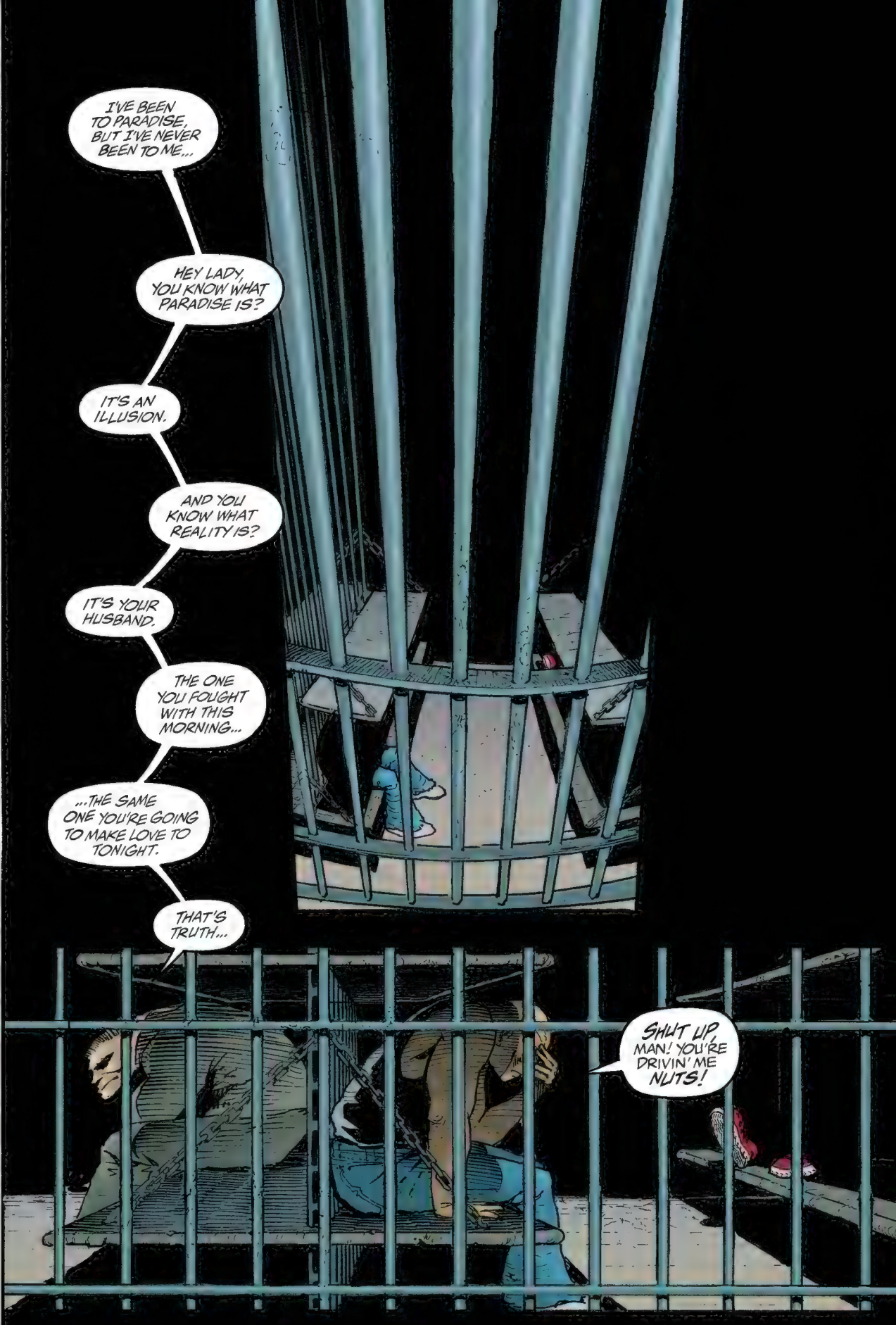
Maxx
Chapter Three

HOW COULD YOU?


Um. YOU, JULIE. YOUR HAIR. IT'S...
FORGET HER HAIR. WHAT ABOUT HER...
IT'S CALLED A BELLY, MAXX. AND IT FEELS AS BIG AS A HOUSE!
HOW DID IT HAPPEN, YOU ASK? WELL... AFTER I MOVED AWAY TO FIND MYSELF, LIFE STILL SUCKED. SO I CHANGED MY NAME, BORROWED A CAR, FILLED UP ON SUGAR AND CARBS, AND RODE HIGH UNTIL I BOTTOMED OUT AND HAD TO FIND MORE SUGAR, MORE GUYS, ANOTHER CAR... YOU GET THE IDEA. ANYWAY, THEN I THOUGHT I KILLED THIS GUY, BUT HE TURNED OUT TO BE AN XMAS TREE. THEN THIS OTHER GUY SHOWED UP. HE WAS HOT-LOOKING SO I SLEPT WITH HIM IN A GIANT DONUT. BUT THEN I STOLE HIS CAR.

I'M KNOCKED UP, ENCLIENTE, WITH CHILD. PREGGERS. ISN'T ANYONE GONNA SAY ANYTHING?
WE... err, WE WERE JUST SURPRISED IS ALL. WE JUST... ARE WE GONNA MEET THE DADDY?
WHO? OH, THE DONUT GUY? I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF HE'S THE SHARPSHOOTER, REALLY.
URRR...
GEE, YOU DON'T EVEN... WELL, I GUESS, I MEAN, IT'S YOUR LIFE.
IT'S JUST IT SEEMS, WELL... KIND OF...
SLUTTY.
WHAT?
OUT!
I DON'T NEED THAT ANTEDILUVIAN CRAP, CERTAINLY NOT FROM YOU!

MAXX, WAIT!
STUPID!
STUPID!
STUPID!
STUPID!
DON'T YOU WANT TO HEAR ABOUT MY DREAM...?
DAMN. HE'S GONE.
YOU CAN'T JUST BREEZE BACK INTO HIS LIFE AND EXPECT HIM TO ACT LIKE NOTHING'S CHANGED.
YOU'RE HIS PROTECTOR NOW?
SO, THAT WAS DRAMATIC.
"I'M HIS FRIEND.
WHUMP!
"I DON'T WANT TO SEE HIM HURT...
"AND THE ONE WHO MOSTLY HURTS HIM...
SLAM!
...IS YOU.


I'VE BEEN TO PARADISE, BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN TO ME...
HEY LADY, YOU KNOW WHAT PARADISE IS?
IT'S AN ILLUSION.
AND YOU KNOW WHAT REALITY IS?
IT'S YOUR HUSBAND.
THE ONE YOU FOUGHT WITH THIS MORNING...
...THE SAME ONE YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE LOVE TO TONIGHT.
THAT'S TRUTH...
SHUT UP, MAN! YOU'RE DRIVIN' ME NUTS!

HEY MAN, THAT'S A FRIGGIN' GREAT SONG!
NOT WHEN YOU SING IT, IT AIN'T!
WHY DON'T YOU KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT, LIKE THIS HARMLESS LITTLE DUDE?
HARMLESS, MY ASS!
THERE'S A BUNCH O' THESE CREEPY LITTLE GUYS ALL OVER TOWN, IF YOU KNOW WHERE T' LOOK.
THEY LOOK HUMAN, BUT THEY'RE NOT.
SHUT UP!
... WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU LOOKIN' AT?
THEY C'N CHANGE SHAPE... EAT THINGS... BUT IF YOU'RE INTERESTED, I MIGHT KNOW A WAY TO--
HEY...

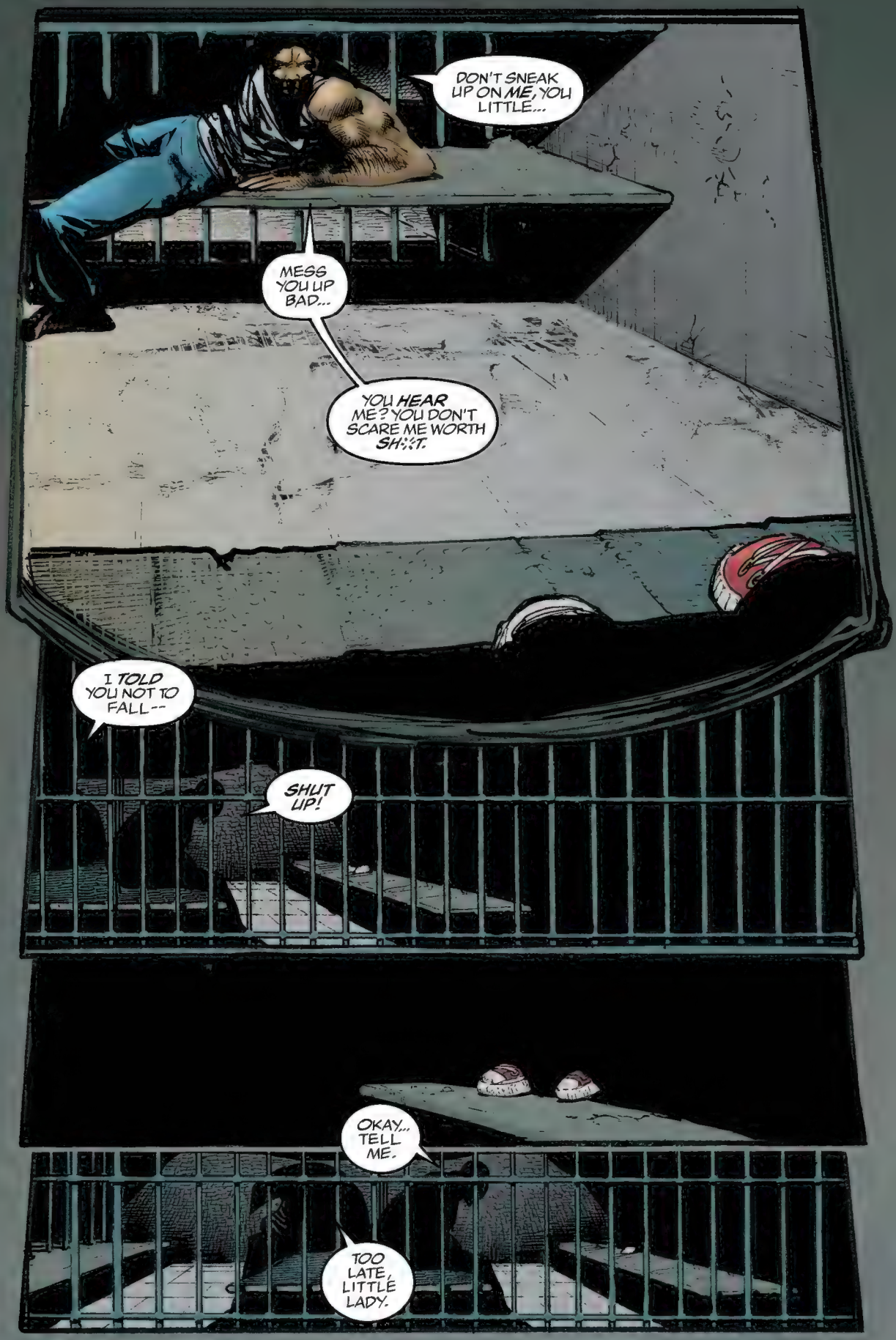
THAT'S RIGHT. YOU BETTER HIDE, YOU LI'L MUTHA!..
JUST SHUT UP.

Sooner or later, you're gonna have to let your fears out of the jar.
Well, Julia's gone nuts...
And Maxx has run off someplace...
I guess I'll just sit here and listen to the confessions of my outlaw dad.
I've been putting it off, and it's not like I really CARE...
Still...hey, why isn't there any SOUND?
NO!
CLK
How could I DO that? How much did I record over?
...SPLIT THE TURNIP. WOW, HONEY, I NEVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT THAT.
I GUESS NOW YOU CAN REALLY UNDERSTAND THE REST OF IT...ANYWAY, I WAS BORN IN OHIO...

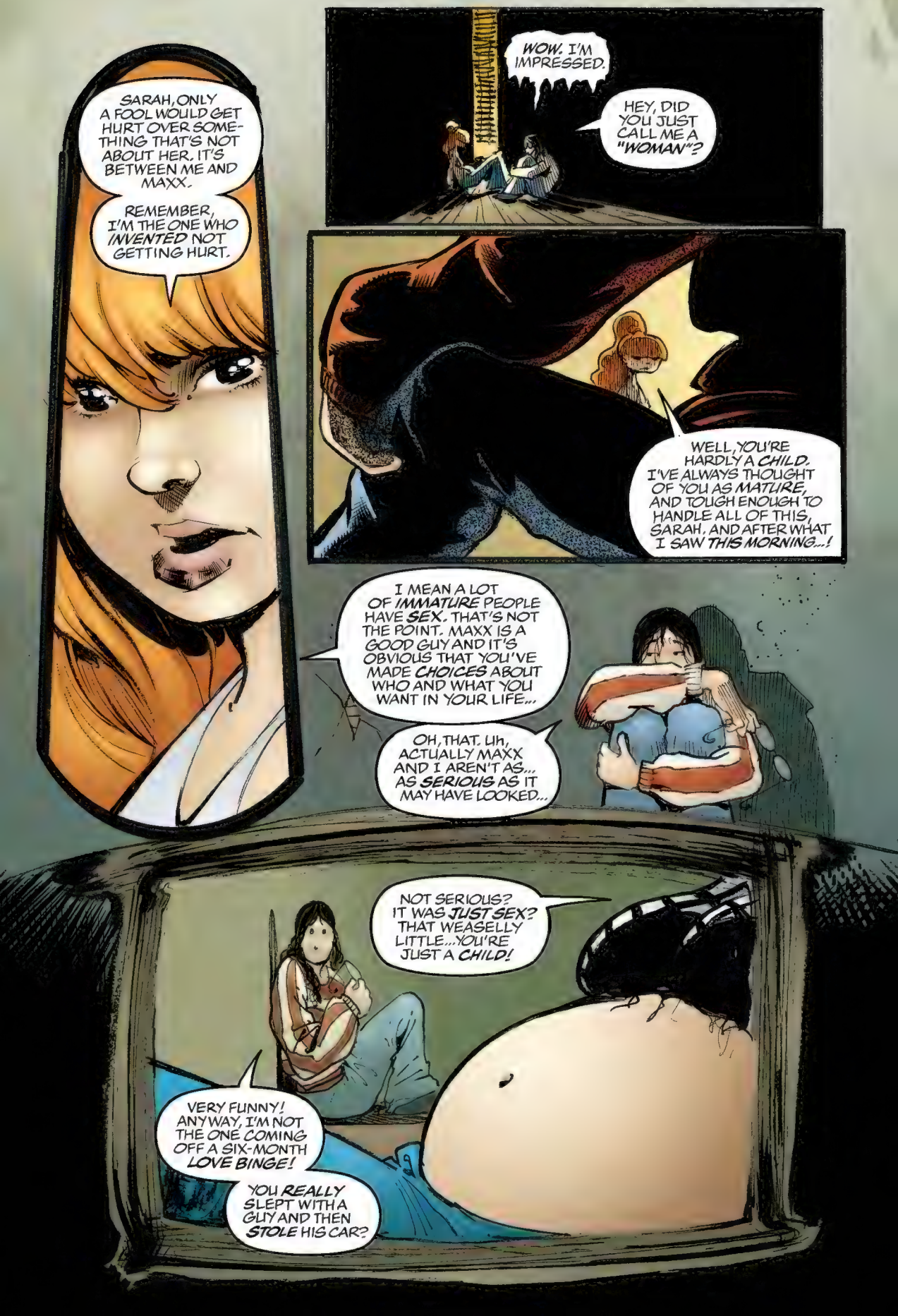
HEY, MAXX.
I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE. I CAN *HEAR* YOUR LABORED BREATHING!
LOOK, YOU *CAN'T* HIDE OUT *FOREVER!* YOU KNOW THAT. JULIE *NEEDS* US NOW.
OH, SURE. SHE ACTS TOUGH... SHE ACTS EXTREME...
WHAT AM I SAYING? SHE *IS* EXTREME! SHE QUIT HER JOB, QUIT *US*, COMMITTED CRIMES, USED GUYS LIKE WE USE *PARKING METERS*, GOT HERSELF *PREGNANT*...
AND YOU CAN'T TELL ME THAT WAS AN *ACCIDENT*, EITHER! NO-YIPPEE-SIREE! IT'S JUST ANOTHER ONE OF HER *HEAD GAMES* TO TEST US AND MAKE US CRAZY AND... AND...
WHERE WAS I?

OH, YEAH.
BUT WE CAN'T SHUT HER OUT. THERE'S THE BABY, FOR ONE THING. AND JULIA DOES NEED US.
SHE MAKES ME FURIOUS TOO, YOU CALLED HER A... A SLUT AND I CAN'T HELP IT, I SORT OF FEEL THAT WAY TOO.
THIS'LL BE ONE MORE THING I CAN BEAT MYSELF UP ABOUT.
IT'S NOT HIP AND I KNOW IT'S KINDA A DOUBLE STANDARD, BUT SHE'S NOT EVEN SORRY! I MEAN, ISN'T SHE SUPPOSED TO GROVEL A LITTLE AND APOLOGIZE TO US?
SAY SOMETHING, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
FINE! SHUT ME OUT TOO. OUR LIVES ARE FALLING APART HERE AND YOU DON'T EVEN CARE. SOME STINKIN' SUPER HERO YOU TURNED OUT TO BE!
AND NOW YOU MADE ME ANGRY. JUST GREAT.
-;MOAN;
SARAH, WAIT...
MUGGED...
GET... HELP...

SHAPE-CHANGERS. MAN. WHAT KINDA FOOL HE TAKE ME FOR?
FOOL'S SAYING I WON'T LAST ALL NIGHT...
HUH?

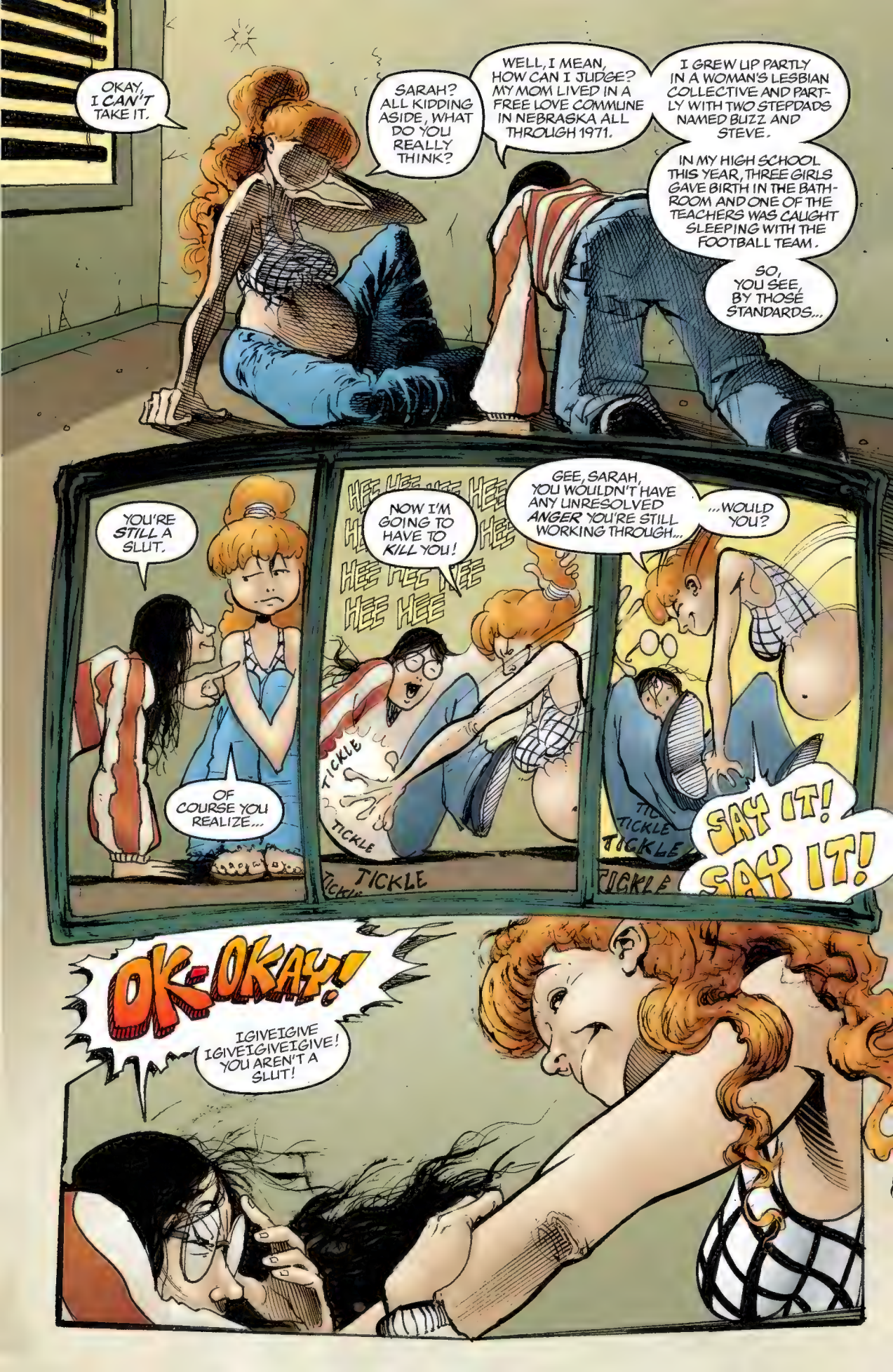

DON'T SNEAK UP ON ME, YOU LITTLE...
MESS YOU UP BAD...
YOU HEAR ME? YOU DON'T SCARE ME WORTH SH!T.
I TOLD YOU NOT TO FALL--
SHUT UP!
OKAY... TELL ME.
TOO LATE, LITTLE LADY.

JULIE, I WANT TO...
WHY ARE YOU SITTING OUT HERE IN THE HALL?
I LOCKED MYSELF OUT. THERE ARE NO LOCKSMITHS OPEN ON SUNDAY. AND I THINK I LEFT THE MACARONI BOILING.
PLEASE DON'T SAY THIS IS SYMBOLIC OF HOW I RUN MY LIFE.
OKAY, I WON'T. BUT IT IS.
THANK YOU. WHERE'S MAXX?
HE'S GONE. MAYBE FOR GOOD.
DON'T BET ON IT.
AND HERE'S A WORD OF ADVICE YOU PROBABLY WON'T LISTEN TO: DON'T WASTE TOO MUCH SYMPATHY ON ME OR MAXX. YOU'LL ONLY GET HURT.
I DON'T GET HURT.
SAYS THE WOMAN WHO'S ONE BIG EXPOSED NERVE END!

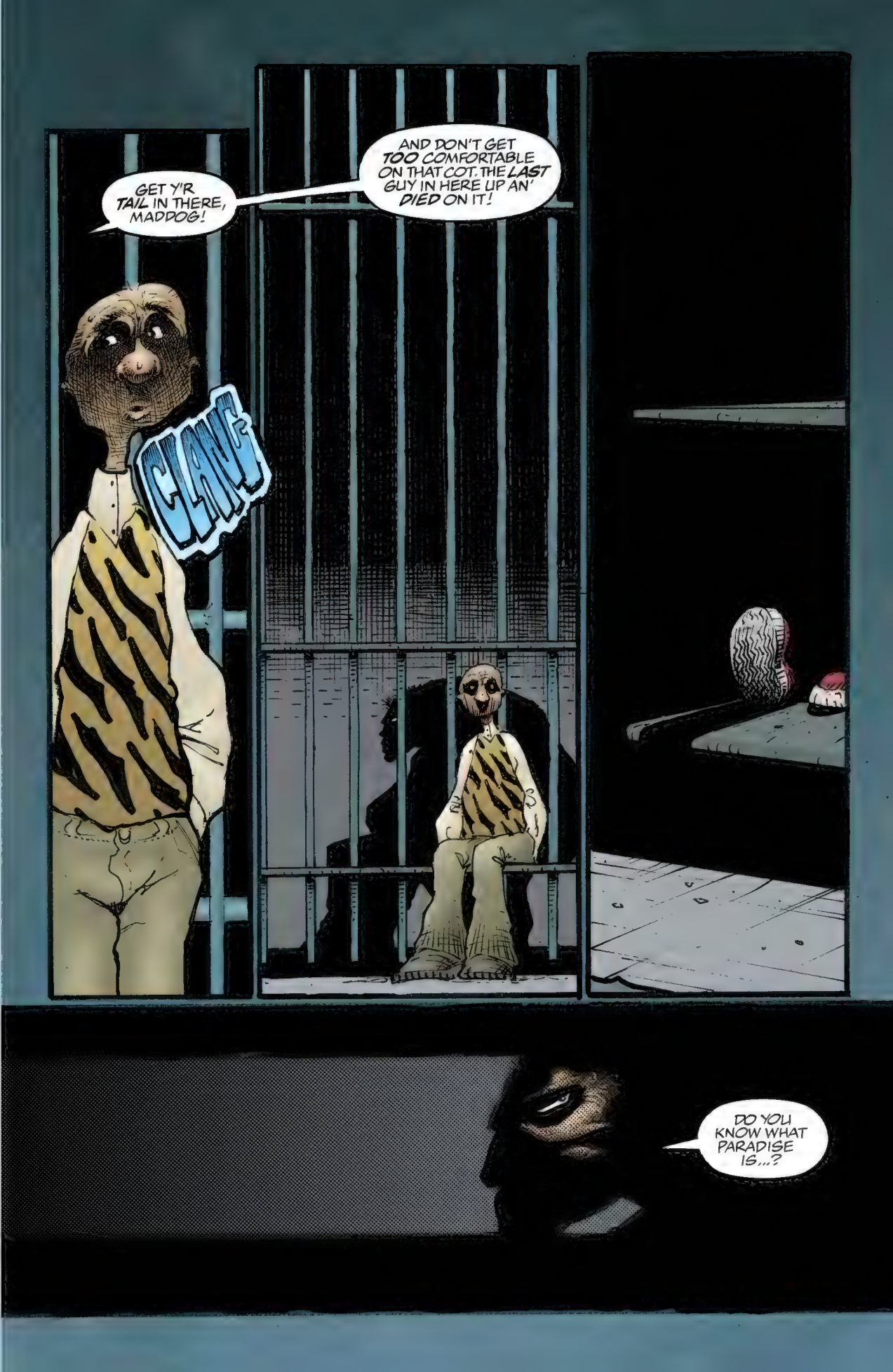

WOW. I'M IMPRESSED.
HEY, DID YOU JUST CALL ME A "WOMAN"?
WELL, YOU'RE HARDLY A CHILD. I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF YOU AS MATURE, AND TOUGH ENOUGH TO HANDLE ALL OF THIS, SARAH. AND AFTER WHAT I SAW THIS MORNING...!
SARAH, ONLY A FOOL WOULD GET HURT OVER SOMETHING THAT'S NOT ABOUT HER. IT'S BETWEEN ME AND MAXX.
REMEMBER, I'M THE ONE WHO INVENTED NOT GETTING HURT.
I MEAN A LOT OF IMMATURE PEOPLE HAVE SEX. THAT'S NOT THE POINT. MAXX IS A GOOD GUY AND IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU'VE MADE CHOICES ABOUT WHO AND WHAT YOU WANT IN YOUR LIFE...
OH, THAT. UH, ACTUALLY MAXX AND I AREN'T AS... AS SERIOUS AS IT MAY HAVE LOOKED...
NOT SERIOUS? IT WAS JUST SEX? THAT WEASELLY LITTLE...YOU'RE JUST A CHILD!
VERY FUNNY! ANYWAY, I'M NOT THE ONE COMING OFF A SIX-MONTH LOVE BINGE!
YOU REALLY SLEPT WITH A GUY AND THEN STOLE HIS CAR?

WELL, NOT STOLE. BORROWED.
I LEFT IT PLAIN AS DAY IN A PUBLIC FOUNTAIN IN ALTOONA, WITH HIS KEYS AND DRIVER'S LICENSE TAPED TO THE WINDSHIELD. I'M SURE HE GOT IT BACK.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
heh heh
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU LEFT US.

SO WHEN ARE YOU DUE?
ANOTHER MONTH, GIVE OR TAKE.
WELL... I GUESS I CAN'T STAY MAD AT YOU FOREVER.
YOU MEAN YOU'VE DECIDED TO "FORGIVE" ME FOR BEING A FALLEN WOMAN. LUCKY ME.
MAYBE I JUST DECIDED TO LIVE MY LIFE AND NOT CARE WHAT ANYBODY THINKS.
SO WHAT DO YOU THINK, SERIOUSLY?
JUST SPIT IT OUT. I CAN TAKE IT. THE TRUTH.
SLUT.
BONK


OKAY, I CAN'T TAKE IT.
SARAH? ALL KIDDING ASIDE, WHAT DO YOU REALLY THINK?
WELL, I MEAN, HOW CAN I JUDGE? MY MOM LIVED IN A FREE LOVE COMMUNE IN NEBRASKA ALL THROUGH 1971.
I GREW UP PARTLY IN A WOMAN'S LESBIAN COLLECTIVE AND PARTLY WITH TWO STEPDADS NAMED BUZZ AND STEVE.
IN MY HIGH SCHOOL THIS YEAR, THREE GIRLS GAVE BIRTH IN THE BATHROOM AND ONE OF THE TEACHERS WAS CAUGHT SLEEPING WITH THE FOOTBALL TEAM.
SO, YOU SEE, BY THOSE STANDARDS...
YOU'RE STILL A SLUT.
OF COURSE YOU REALIZE...
NOW I'M GOING TO HAVE TO KILL YOU!
HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE
TICKLE
TICKLE
TICKLE
GEE, SARAH, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE ANY UNRESOLVED ANGER YOU'RE STILL WORKING THROUGH...
...WOULD YOU?
TICKLE
TICKLE
TICKLE
SAY IT! SAY IT!
OK-OKAY!
IGIVEIGIVE IGIVEIGIVEIGIVE! YOU AREN'T A SLUT!

YES, I AM. AT LEAST, I *ACTED* SLUTTISH. NOBODY'S *PERFECT.* I'M A SLUT, MAXX IS A LUNEY-TOON, AND YOU'RE THE DAUGHTER OF A MASS MURDER--
OOPS. THAT DIDN'T COME OUT...
SARAH, WAIT.
DAMN.

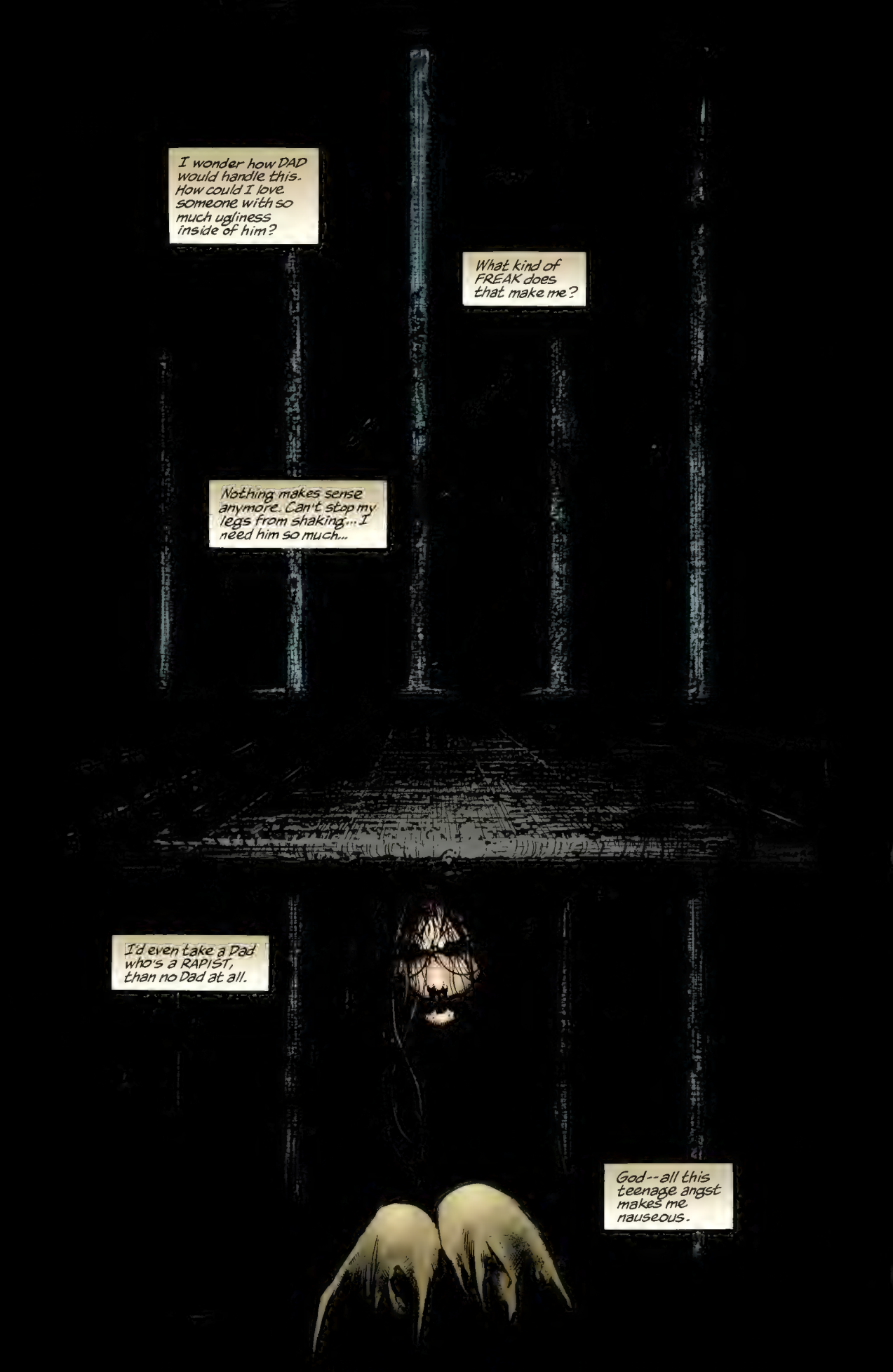

GET Y'R TAIL IN THERE, MADDOG!
AND DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE ON THAT COT. THE LAST GUY IN HERE UP AN' DIED ON IT!
CLANG
DO YOU KNOW WHAT PARADISE IS...?

SARAH...
COME BACK...
MUGGED...
SO, THE THING IS... I'VE DRIVEN AWAY EVERYBODY WHO EVER CARED ABOUT ME. SARAH, MAXX, THE DONUT GUY. EVEN MY SHRINK HATES ME. -sigh-
WELL, KID, I GUESS IT'S JUST YOU AND ME.

Chapter Four

THE MAXX

How the hell did I wind up here?
Looks like that creepy little dude in the corner's not gonna be any TROUBLE, at least. Those have got to be the largest SNEAKERS I've ever seen.
That's right, little creep-- you just sit there and pick your nose and stay the hell away from me.


I wonder how DAD would handle this. How could I love someone with so much ugliness inside of him?
What kind of FREAK does that make me?
Nothing makes sense anymore. Can't stop my legs from shaking... I need him so much...
I'd even take a Dad who's a RAPIST, than no Dad at all.
God--all this teenage angst makes me nauseous.

How much worse can it get? I'm in jail for the night. I'd better not turn my back on the little guy with big feet. I've truly hit bottom, I'm in...
HEY LADY.
THE NAME'S FRIDGE.
YOU KNOW THAT LITTLE GUY ACROSS FROM YOU? HE'S NOT LIKE US. HE'S NOT EVEN HUMAN. THAT THING ATE THE LAST TWO GUYS IN HERE. IT LOOKS HUMAN, BUT IT'S NOT.
YEAH, RIGHT. GIMME A BREAK.
BEFORE THE NIGHT'S OVER, YOU'LL KNOW...

It took most of the night to push that old freak's threats out of my mind...
...and about a second for it all to come...
...back.
WHY YOU LITTLE...
:SNICKER:
SHUT UP!

I LOVE THIS FRIGGIN' SONG. IT'S GREAT. IT'S ABOUT THIS WOMAN WHO TELLS THIS HOUSEWIFE ABOUT...
I'VE *HEARD* IT. IT MAKES ME *ILL*.
THEN I'LL TURN IT UP NICE AND LOUD, JUST FOR YOU.
YOU KNOW WHAT PARADISE IS? IT'S AN ILLUSION. YOU KNOW WHAT REALITY IS? IT'S YOUR HUSBAND, THE SAME ONE YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE LOVE TO TONIGHT. THAT'S BEAUTY. THAT'S TRUTH.
O.K. I'm still in jail, the little creep is still in the corner, but now he's movin' in, and this jerk is forcing me to listen to the worst song in the world. How did I get here?
A mere 24 hours ago, everything was...

...clear.
. . . . . .CLICK.
WOW! SO THAT'S IT. THIS TAPE EXPLAINS IT ALL. DAD KNEW EVERYTHING, AND NOW I'VE GOT TO TELL THEM BOTH.

The first one I went to was Maxx. There wasn't much time, and Maxx was our only chance. Julie was still in la-la land.
Well, I didn't need the tape to tell me that.
HEY, UNCLE EDDIE! THAT CHICK'S GONNA RAT OUT OUR TAGGING!
FFSSSSSS
GOLLY-- THAT'S UNFAIR. LET'S SKEEDADDLE!
The taggers took off when I came to Maxx's alley, and like an idiot, I picked up the can.
FREEZE!
was the cliché the cops chose.
I left my one phone call on my mom's answering machine. Sooner or later she's bound to get it... it's the LATER I worry about.

Jesus! He must have the damn thing on repeat. It's a special form of hell, listening to the same song over and over, let alone one as bad as this.
Even though Fridge is sitting up, I can still hear him snoring. But the snoring guy in the next cell is the least of my worries.
It's the silent one in front of me that's got me creeped out.

So if he has bad enough taste to want to eat ME...
...maybe he can stomach this music.
BONK!
CRUNCH!
...GONNA MAKE LOVE TO TONIGHT...

Well, great. Solves one problem, creates another. Now I get to hear a Muppet version coming out of his stomach.
HEY, WHERE'S MY HEADPHONES?
STOW IT, JOLLY BOY.
At least he's asleep now. Dad's tape said these little guys are blind as bats. They feel and sniff their prey. Since I can't tie his hands...
...these cigarette butts...
...will have to serve as noseplugs.
Hey, cool! They muffle the sound, too!

WELL, KID, YA DONE PRETTY GOOD, SO FAR.
THE OTHER TWO GUYS DIDN'T LAST THIS LONG. I STILL OUGHTA MESS YOU UP FOR TRASHIN' MY DISC PLAYER AND HEAD-PHONES LIKE DAT.
I'M SHAKIN'.
TELL YA WHAT, KID. THAT THING'S STILL WORKIN' INSIDE. GET YOUR HANDS ON A GOOD SHANK, AND YOU COULD CUT 'IM OPEN. SOLVE BOTH OUR PROBLEMS.
'S'N'OL' MAGAZINE, LADIES' HOME JOURNAL, I THINK.
GREAT. IF I HAD A SHANK.
THE ANSWER'S RIGHT UNDER YOUR BUTT.
IT'S BEEN SOAKED, DRIED AND TWISTED TO A POINT. JUST ONE THING, KID--YOU SURE THEY CAN'T HEAR?
YOU KNOW, I JUST DON'T CARE!

SHE'S GONE. THEY MUST'VE LET HER OUT WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING.
YOU LEAP TO YOUR FEET AND THE FIRST THING YOU REALIZE IS...
SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF
...NOT ONLY IS SHE GONE, BUT EVERYTHING IS.

THERE'S NOT A SMELL IN THE WHOLE PLACE. SO YOU FEEL...
SNIFF SNIFF
...UNDER YOUR BUNK...
SNIFF SNIFF
...JUST TO MAKE SURE.
NOTHING.
SO YOU CHECK HER SIDE, FEELING EVERY SQUARE INCH UNDERNEATH.
EVEN THE UPPER BUNK. BUT STILL...
...EMPTY.

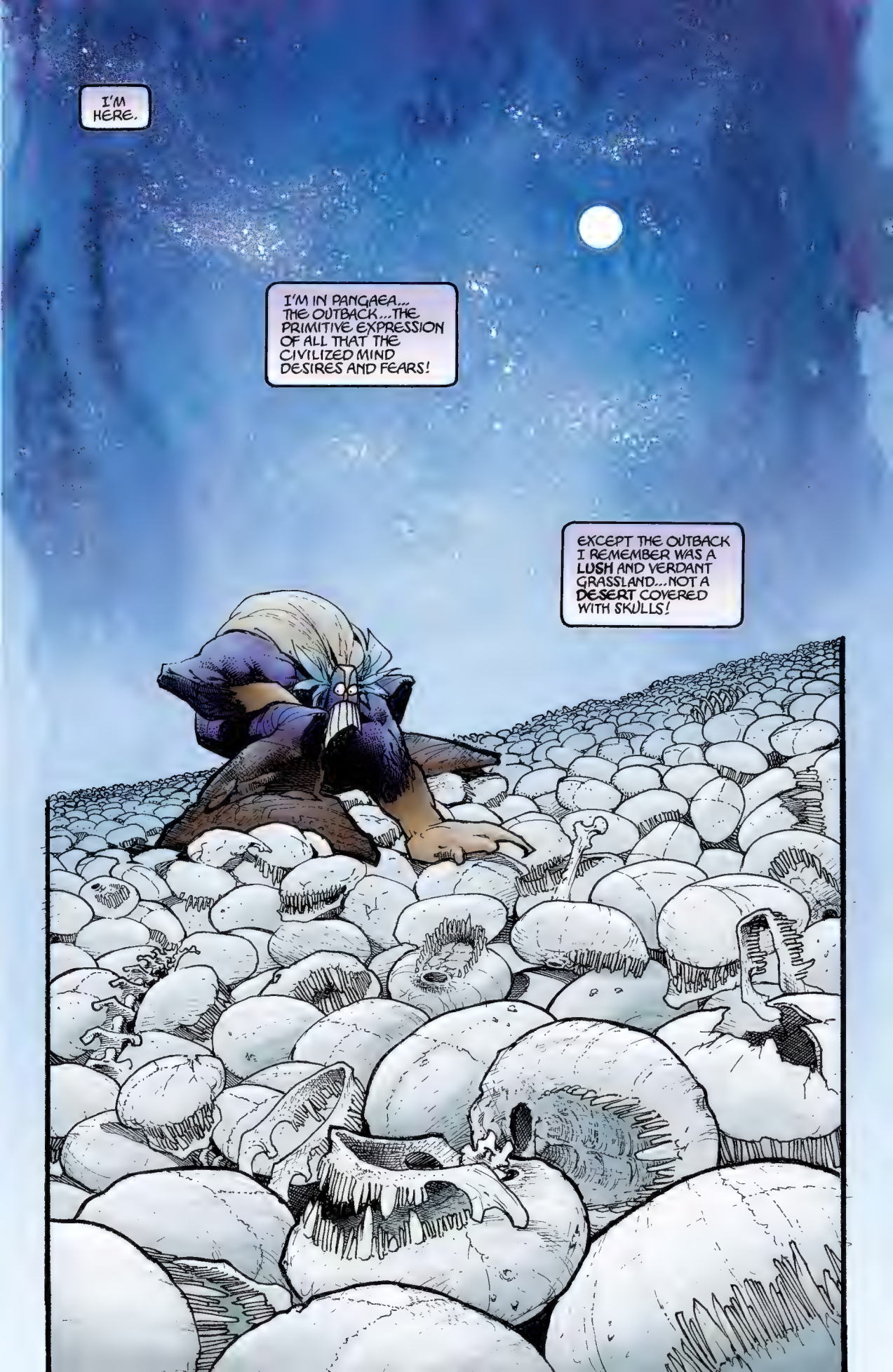
BUT YOU'RE STILL HUNGRY, AND WHO KNOWS HOW LONG IT'S GONNA BE BEFORE THEY BRING SOME-BODY ELSE IN.
COULD BE HOURS...
...OR DAYS.
FRIDGE DOESN'T EXACTLY FIT THROUGH THE BARS.
NOT ALL AT ONCE, ANYWAY.
CHOMP
CHOMP
CHOMP

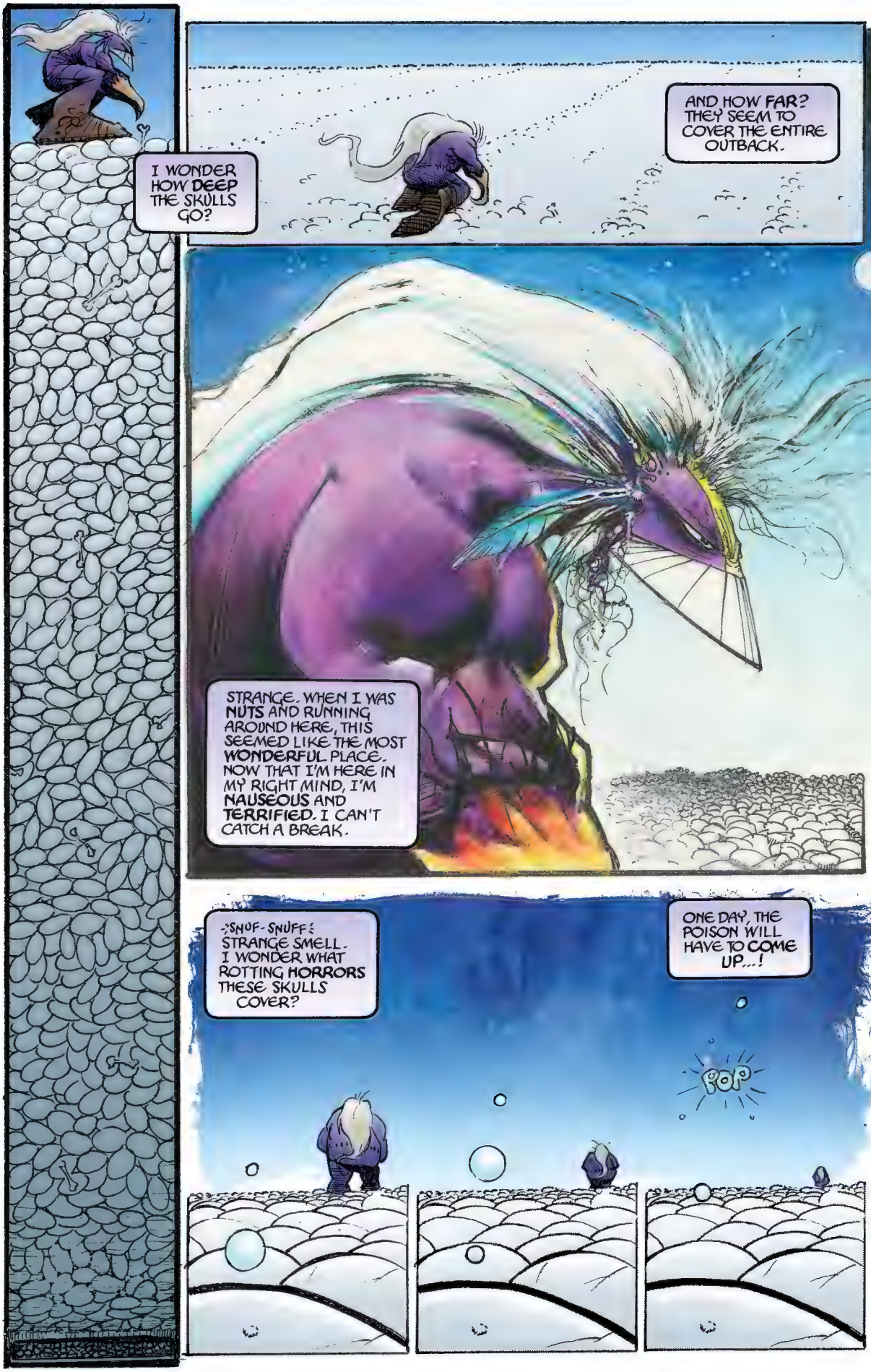
YOU COME BACK TO THE ONLY PLACE YOU'RE SAFE.
THE ONLY PLACE YOU HAVEN'T SEARCHED.
AND SHE WAS RIGHT THERE THE WHOLE TIME.
POP!
shhhhh
SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF
EEEEPP!

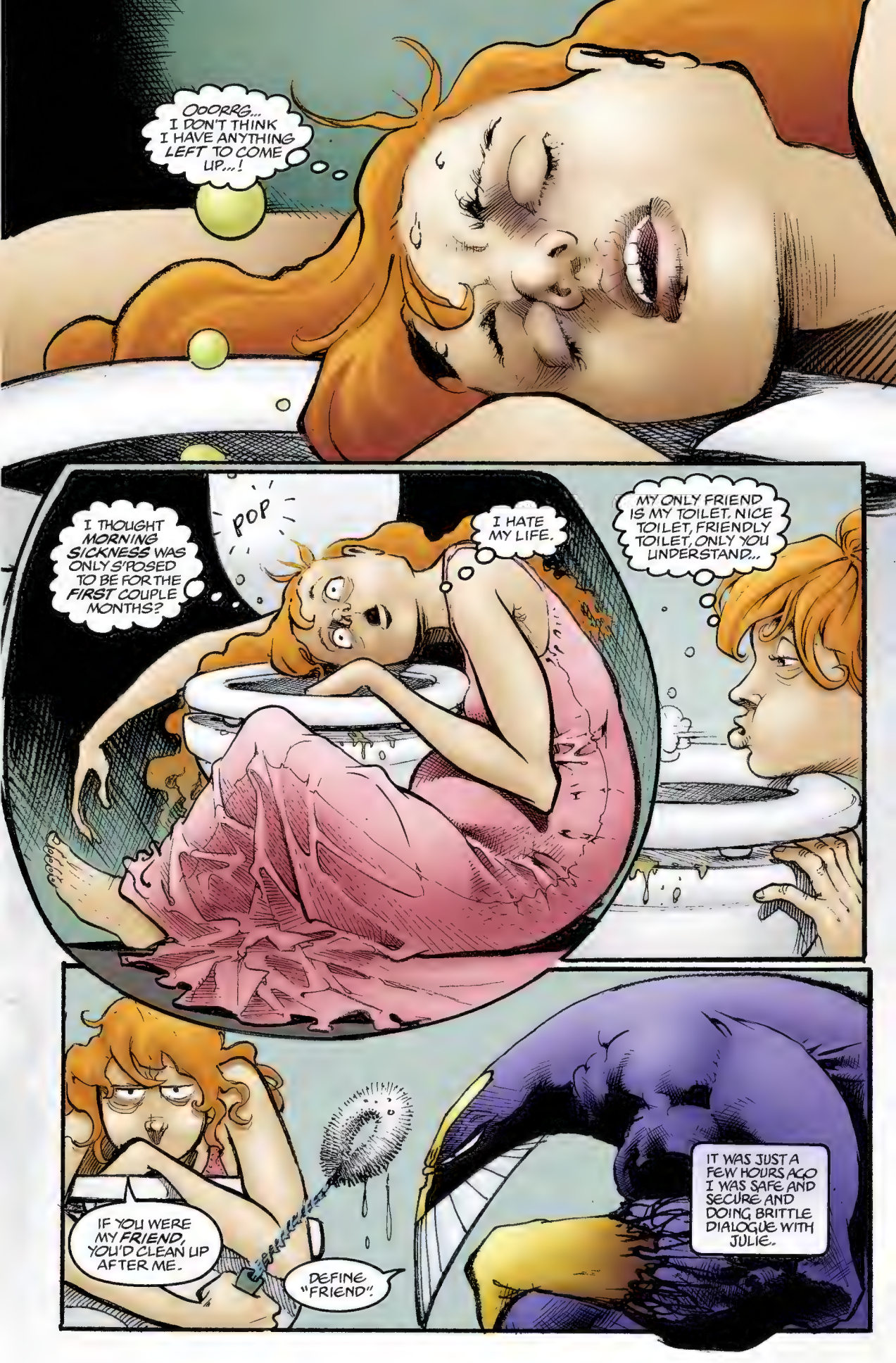
I figured Fridge wasn't going to be needing the CD player anymore. So I left it in.

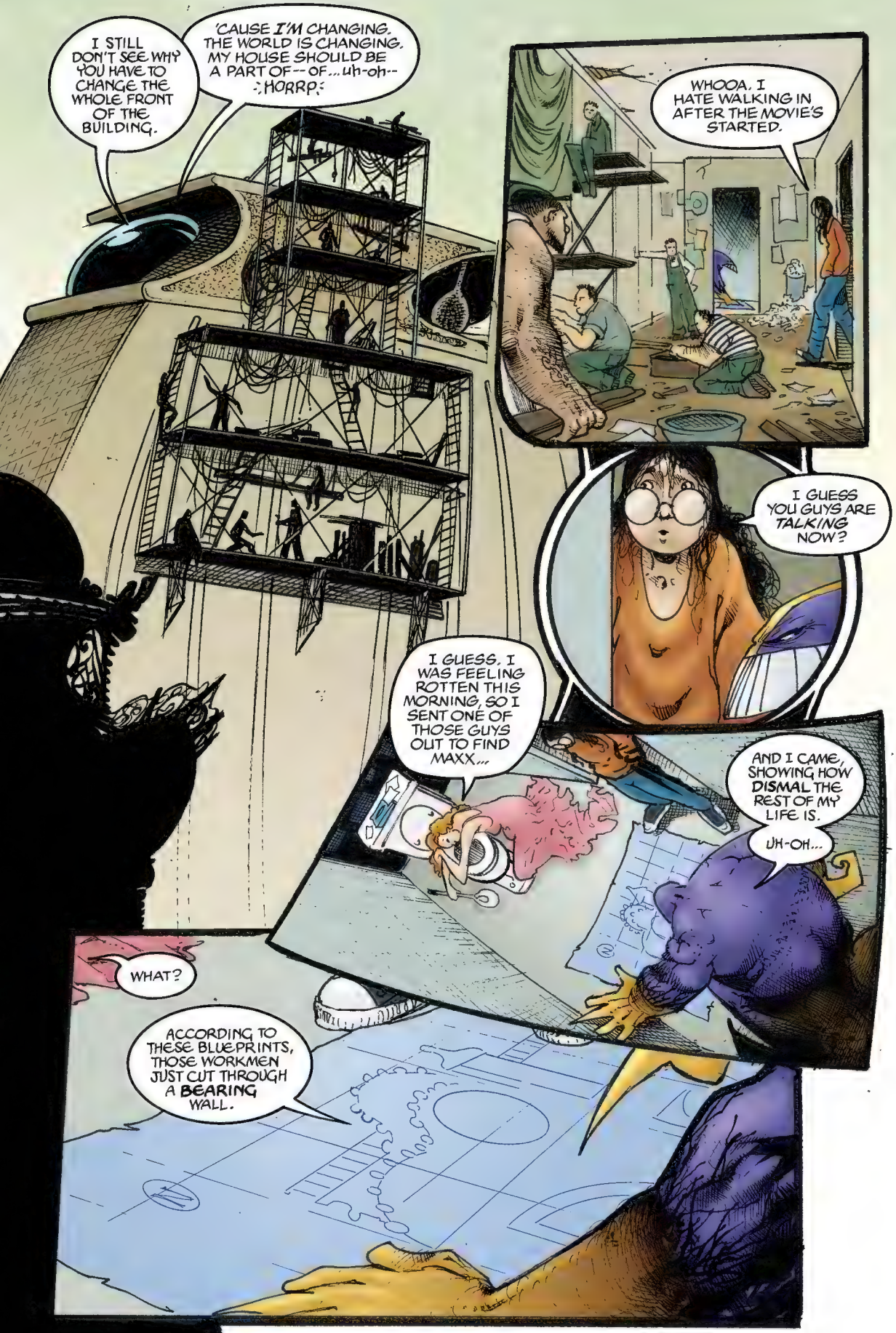
So that's how I got here. Mom was pretty cool. She didn't give me too hard a time. I think she figured I must've had a pretty rough night.
And I was gonna take every inch of slack she gave.
It's funny, but it was something my dad said on the tape that saved me. I guess Dad's not the only one with ugliness inside him. Maybe sometimes you have to be ugly...
...to survive.

Chapter Five
WAR


I'M HERE.
I'M IN PANGAEA... THE OUTBACK... THE PRIMITIVE EXPRESSION OF ALL THAT THE CIVILIZED MIND DESIRES AND FEARS!
EXCEPT THE OUTBACK I REMEMBER WAS A LUSH AND VERDANT GRASSLAND... NOT A DESERT COVERED WITH SKULLS!

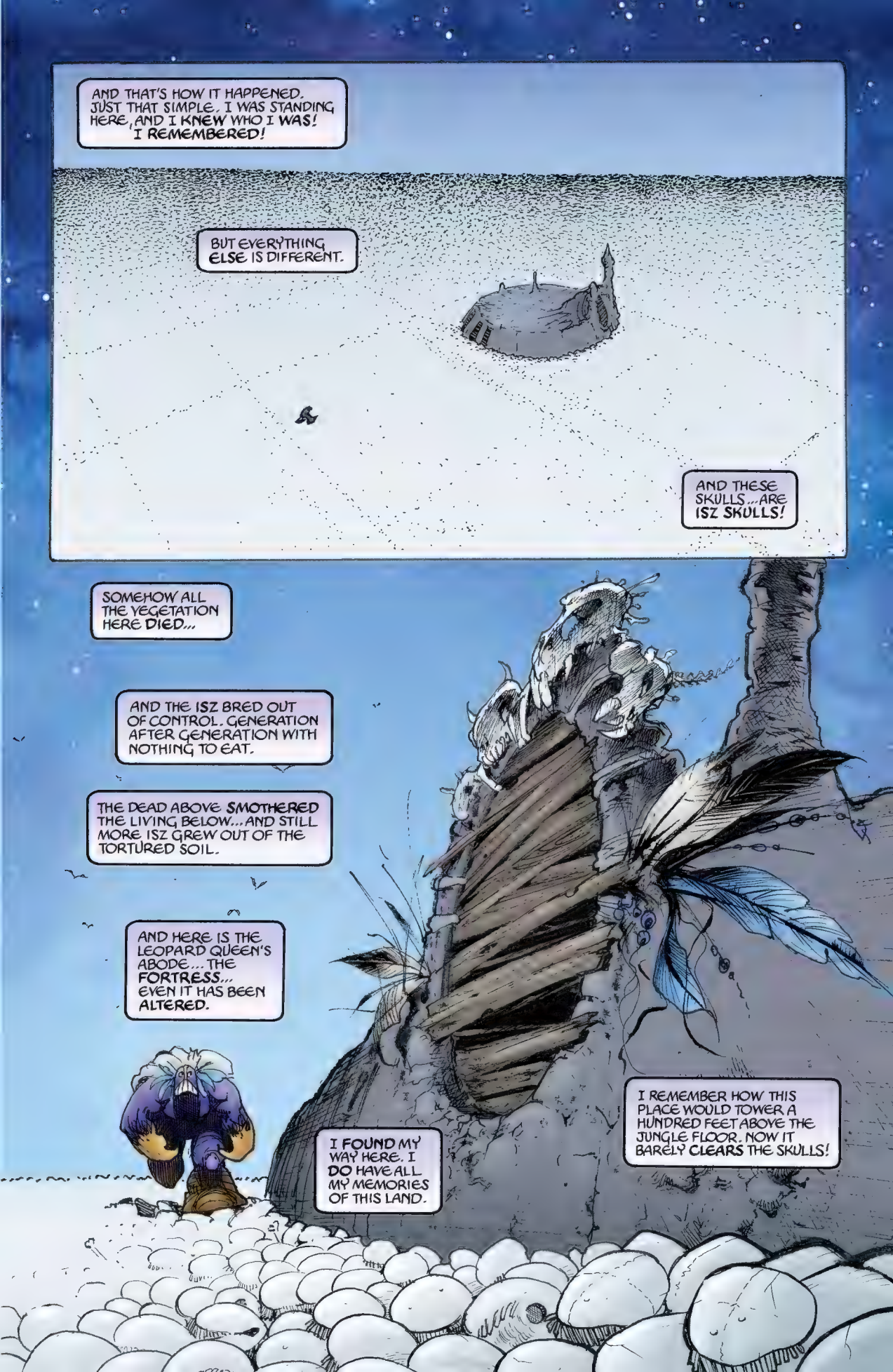

I WONDER HOW DEEP THE SKULLS GO?
AND HOW FAR? THEY SEEM TO COVER THE ENTIRE OUTBACK.
STRANGE. WHEN I WAS NUTS AND RUNNING AROUND HERE, THIS SEEMED LIKE THE MOST WONDERFUL PLACE. NOW THAT I'M HERE IN MY RIGHT MIND, I'M NAUSEOUS AND TERRIFIED. I CAN'T CATCH A BREAK.
:SNUF- SNUFF: STRANGE SMELL. I WONDER WHAT ROTTING HORRORS THESE SKULLS COVER?
ONE DAY, THE POISON WILL HAVE TO COME UP...!
POP


OOORRG... I DON'T THINK I HAVE ANYTHING LEFT TO COME UP...!
I THOUGHT MORNING SICKNESS WAS ONLY S'POSED TO BE FOR THE FIRST COUPLE MONTHS?
POP
I HATE MY LIFE.
MY ONLY FRIEND IS MY TOILET. NICE TOILET, FRIENDLY TOILET, ONLY YOU UNDERSTAND...
IF YOU WERE MY FRIEND, YOU'D CLEAN UP AFTER ME.
DEFINE "FRIEND".
IT WAS JUST A FEW HOURS AGO I WAS SAFE AND SECURE AND DOING BRITTLE DIALOGUE WITH JULIE.


I STILL DON'T SEE WHY YOU HAVE TO CHANGE THE WHOLE FRONT OF THE BUILDING.
'CAUSE I'M CHANGING. THE WORLD IS CHANGING. MY HOUSE SHOULD BE A PART OF--OF...uh-oh--
:HORRP:
WHOOA. I HATE WALKING IN AFTER THE MOVIE'S STARTED.
I GUESS YOU GUYS ARE TALKING NOW?
I GUESS, I WAS FEELING ROTTEN THIS MORNING, SO I SENT ONE OF THOSE GUYS OUT TO FIND MAXX...
AND I CAME, SHOWING HOW DISMAL THE REST OF MY LIFE IS.
UH-OH...
WHAT?
ACCORDING TO THESE BLUEPRINTS, THOSE WORKMEN JUST CUT THROUGH A BEARING WALL.

IT WAS AWFULLY NICE OF YOU TO RUSH OVER HERE, MAXX...
THAT'S OKAY. I GUESS I FORGIVE YOU, JULIE. NO MATTER HOW BIG A JERK YOU WERE OR HOW SLUTTY YOU ACTED...
YOU'RE STILL MY FRIEND.
WAIT A SECOND. YOU FORGIVE ME...? I WAS THE ONE THAT CAUGHT YOU TWO IN BED
MAXX, LET'S TAKE A WALK BEFORE WE SMOTHER FROM ALL THE GOOD WILL IN THIS ROOM.
BUT MORE IMPORTANT... I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOTTA DO! WE HAVE TO GO BACK WHERE IT STARTED IN THIS WORLD, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, YOU HAVE TO GO INTO THE OUTBACK AS YOURSELF!
YOU HAVE TO BRING ON THE HEADACHE... GO TOWARDS THE NOISE. CONTROL THE PROCESS!
MAXX, WE HAVE TO TALK... I LISTENED TO DAD'S TAPES... THEY TOLD ME EVERYTHING!
THAT NIGHT, IT WASN'T OUR BODIES THAT JOINED, IT WAS OUR MINDS! WE HAD EACH OTHER'S DREAMS... I KNOW WHO YOU ARE!
CAN YOU AT LEAST TRY, DAVE?

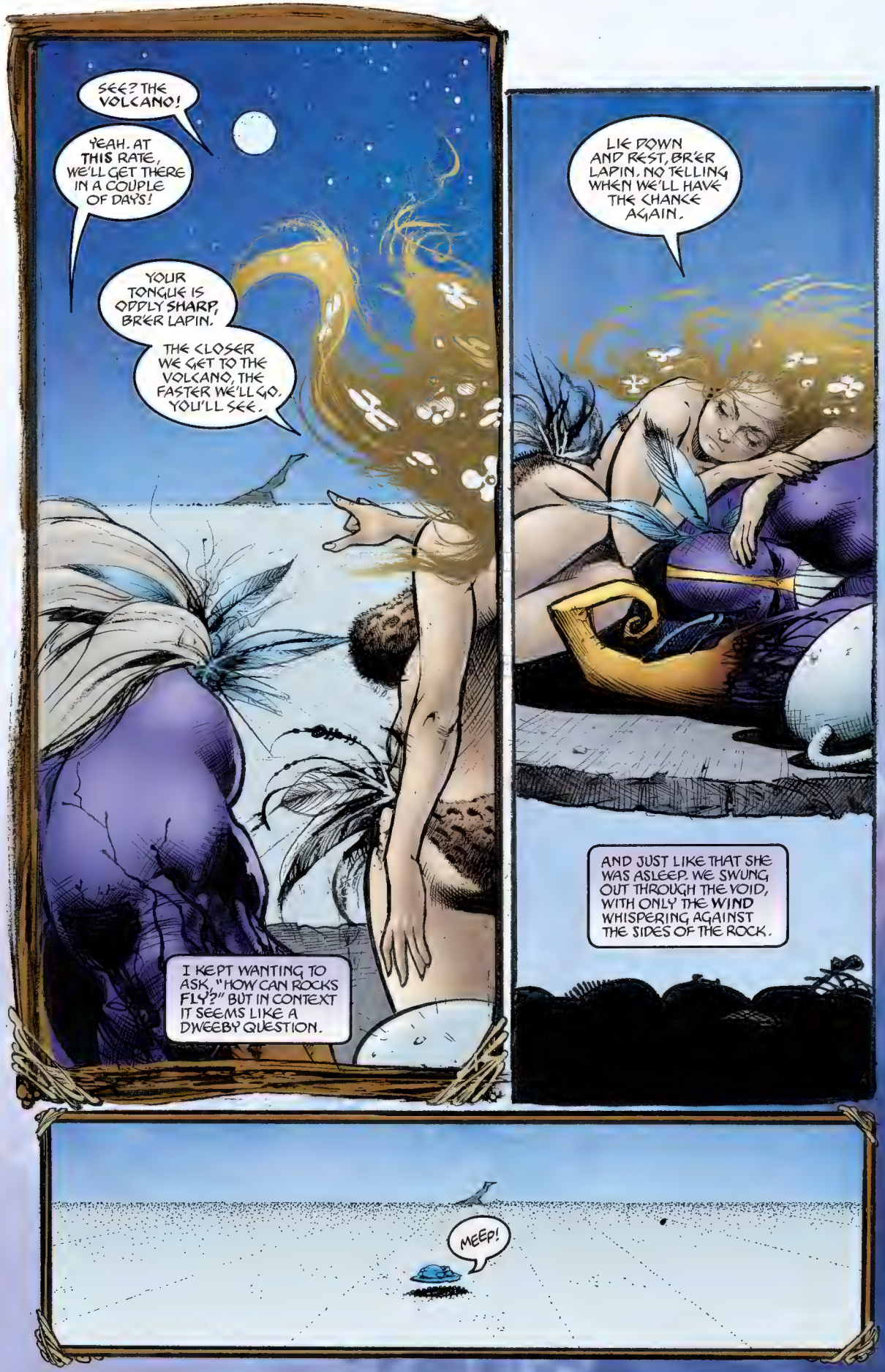
WHY DID SHE CALL ME THAT
UHHH...! IT'S STARTED!
I WILL TRY!
I WILL MOVE TOWARDS THE SOURCE OF THE DRUMS...! IGNORE THE PAIN! LEAP INTO THE VOID!
AND FINALLY FIND OUT WHAT THOSE DAMNED CHUNGS MEAN!
FOR I AM THE MAXX!
CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG


AND THAT'S HOW IT HAPPENED. JUST THAT SIMPLE. I WAS STANDING HERE, AND I KNEW WHO I WAS! I REMEMBERED!
BUT EVERYTHING ELSE IS DIFFERENT.
AND THESE SKULLS...ARE ISZ SKULLS!
SOMEHOW ALL THE YEGETATION HERE DIED...
AND THE ISZ BRED OUT OF CONTROL. GENERATION AFTER GENERATION WITH NOTHING TO EAT.
THE DEAD ABOVE SMOTHERED THE LIVING BELOW...AND STILL MORE ISZ GREW OUT OF THE TORTURED SOIL.
AND HERE IS THE LEOPARD QUEEN'S ABODE... THE FORTRESS... EVEN IT HAS BEEN ALTERED.
I REMEMBER HOW THIS PLACE WOULD TOWER A HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE JUNGLE FLOOR. NOW IT BARELY CLEARS THE SKULLS!
I FOUND MY WAY HERE. I DO HAVE ALL MY MEMORIES OF THIS LAND.

I HAVE TO FIND HER.
MY GODDESS. MY...
...QUEEN.
BR'ER LAPIN! I KNEW YOU'D COME!
TAKE OFF YOUR MASK. I HAVE TO BE SURE...
YES, IT'S YOU, BR'ER LAPIN. YOU'RE AS REAL AS THE EDGE ON MY SPEAR!
MY GOD... I'M A BIG BUNNY HERE! NOW I'M REALLY CONFUSED.
BUT YOUR HAIR! AND THE FORTRESS! THEY'VE CHANGED! HAVE YOU HEALED, MY QUEEN?
THE HEALING INSIDE HAS BEGUN, BR'ER LAPIN. BUT THE LAND IS STILL VERY SICK... AND THE POISON MUST BE EXPELLED FROM UNDERNEATH.

HOW I'VE MISSED YOU, BR'ER LAPIN. IT'S LIKE A PART OF MYSELF HAS RETURNED.
ARE YOU STILL HAVING THOSE NASTY NIGHTMARES THAT YOU'RE A MAN?
ACTUALLY, I'M HAVING ONE RIGHT NOW!
IT'S OKAY. YOU'RE SAFE HERE WITH ME, WHERE YOU BELONG.
COME ON. PUT ON YOUR MASK. WE HAVE TO GO.
GO? GO WHERE?
TO THE VOLCANO, OF COURSE. IT'S WHERE THIS ALL BEGAN!
HEY! THERE'S AN ISZ UP HERE!
HE MUST'VE GOTTEN STUCK!
DON'T WORRY. HE'S HARMLESS.

YOU SEE, WE HAVE TO GET THERE IN A HURRY...SO WE'LL GO BY ROCK.
YOU MEAN, BREAK OFF A LAYER LIKE... THIS?
JUST WHEN I FEEL MY LIFE IS UNDER CONTROL, SOMEBODY SAYS SOMETHING LIKE, "WE'LL GO BY ROCK"!
NO, NO! YOU BROKE IT!
I'M SO TIRED OF SCREWING UP!
CRACK!
MEEP!
THIS IS OKAY. IT'S STILL BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD US. AND WE'LL NEED THESE VINES...
HEY! IT'S STARTING TO...
WHUMP!
JUMP ON! IT'S MOVING!
...FLOAT! IT'S STARTING TO FLOAT!
DON'T PANIC. IT'S NOT MOVING THAT FAST.


SEE? THE VOLCANO!
YEAH. AT THIS RATE, WE'LL GET THERE IN A COUPLE OF DAYS!
YOUR TONGUE IS ODDLY SHARP, BR'ER LAPIN.
THE CLOSER WE GET TO THE VOLCANO, THE FASTER WE'LL GO. YOU'LL SEE.
I KEPT WANTING TO ASK, "HOW CAN ROCKS FLY?" BUT IN CONTEXT IT SEEMS LIKE A DWEEBY QUESTION.
LIE DOWN AND REST, BR'ER LAPIN. NO TELLING WHEN WE'LL HAVE THE CHANCE AGAIN.
AND JUST LIKE THAT SHE WAS ASLEEP. WE SWUNG OUT THROUGH THE VOID, WITH ONLY THE WIND WHISPERING AGAINST THE SIDES OF THE ROCK.
MEEP!

WAKE UP, BR'ER LAPIN. WE'RE NEARLY THERE.
IT WAS NEARLY LATE AFTERNOON. I HAD SLEPT THROUGH THE NIGHT AND MOST OF THE FOLLOWING DAY. SURREALISM TAKES A LOT OUT OF YOU.
HEY, IT'S BIGGER!
THE FASTER WE GO, THE WIDER IT GROWS, REMEMBER?
UH, SURE!
THE SUN'S GOING DOWN. OUR LUCK IS HOLDING! TWILIGHT IS THE BEST TIME FOR THIS SORT OF THING.
WHAT SORT OF THING?
WHY, SACRIFICIAL MAGIK, OF COURSE. IT'S ALL THAT WILL SAVE THE UNIVERSE.
THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP
I'D FORGOTTEN JUST HOW MUCH I HATE SAVING THE UNIVERSE.
THE QUESTION I SHOULD'VE ASKED RIGHT ABOUT NOW WAS, "WHAT SACRIFICE?"
MEEP!
THERE'S NOTHING LIKE FLYING ON A SLAB OF ROCK OVER AN ENDLESS FIELD OF SKULLS TOWARD A MYSTICALLY SMOLDERING VOLCANO TO REALLY GIVE YOU A SENSE OF YOUR OWN MORTALITY.
CAN WE STEER THIS THING OR ARE WE ON AUTOPILOT? I MEAN, WHAT IF SOMETHING'S IN OUR--

CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK
EVERYBODY DUCK!
--WAY?
CRACK CRACK CRACK
DUCK WHEN I SAY DUCK!
IT'S AN AIR WHALE SKELETON! AND WE'RE GOING RIGHT THROUGH IT!
GUESS THAT ANSWERS THAT QUESTION.
GOD KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING BACK IN...

...DODGE.

YIPES! DID YOU *HAVE* TO BREAK ALL THOSE *STREET-LIGHTS?*

DID YOU EVEN *HEAR* ME SAY *DUCK?*

AND *WHY* DO WE HAVE TO RIDE *ON TOP* OF THE BUS?

BECAUSE I AM THE *MAXX!*

CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG

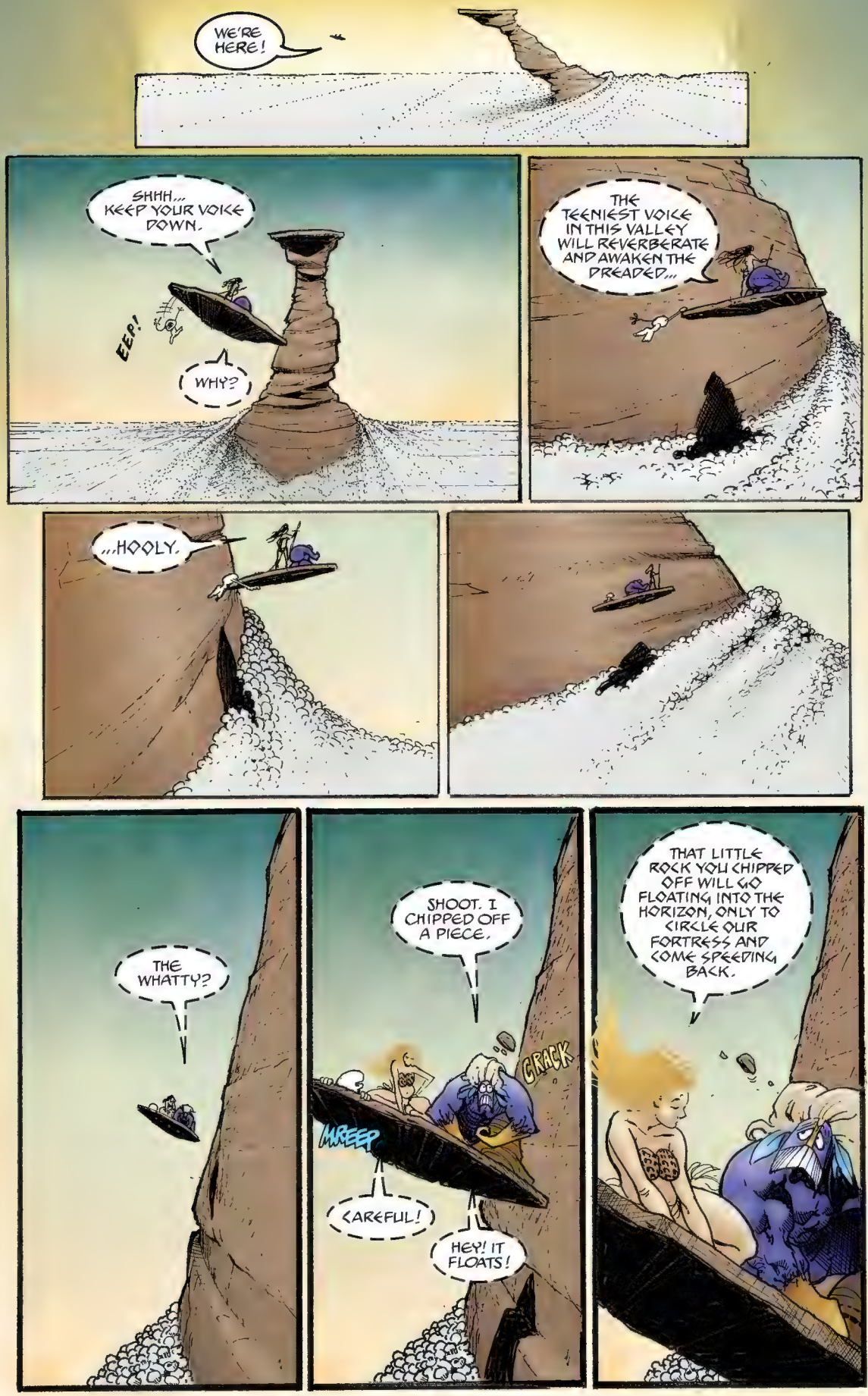
IS THERE EVER A TIME YOU *DON'T* SAY THAT?

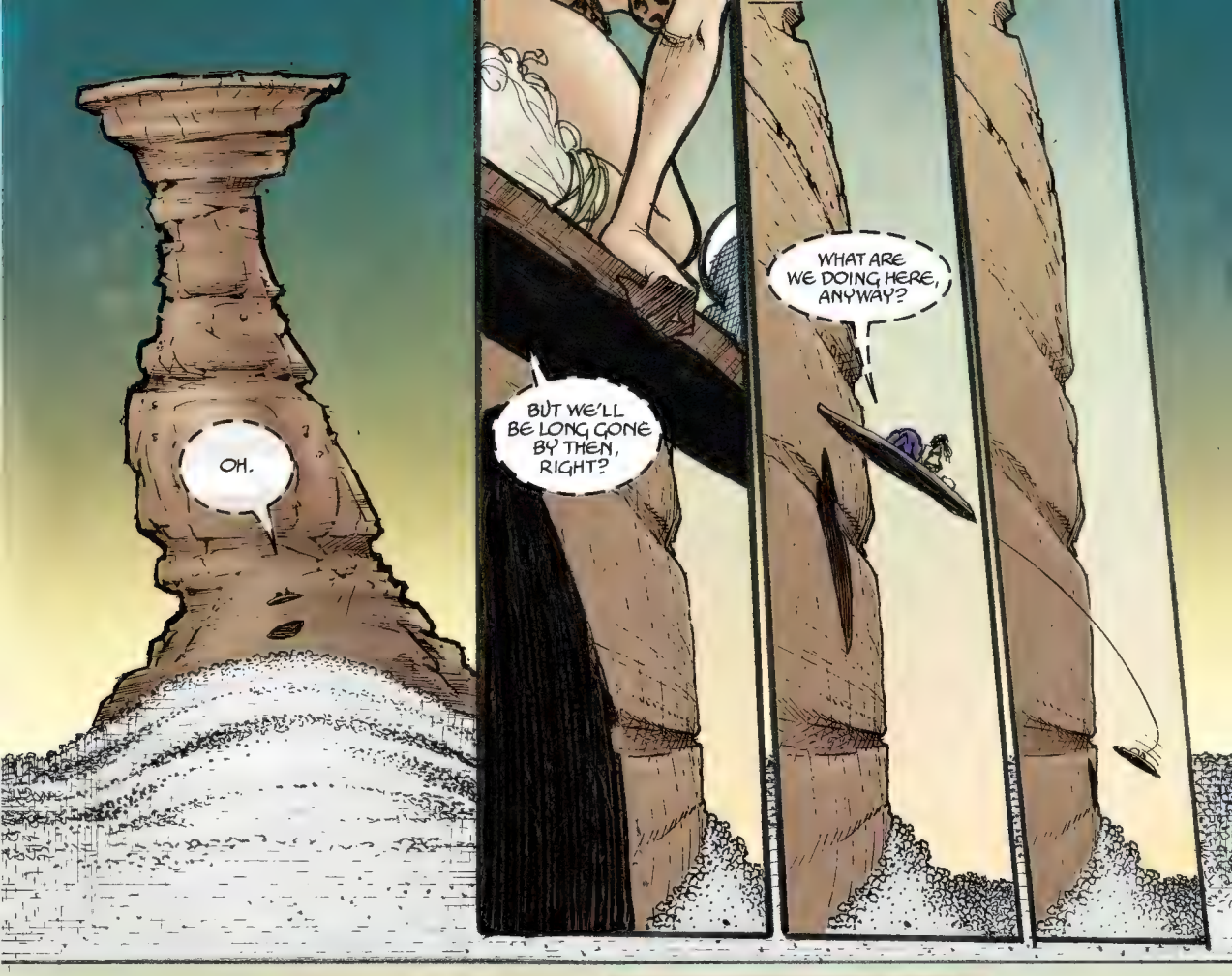
NO. NOT REALLY.

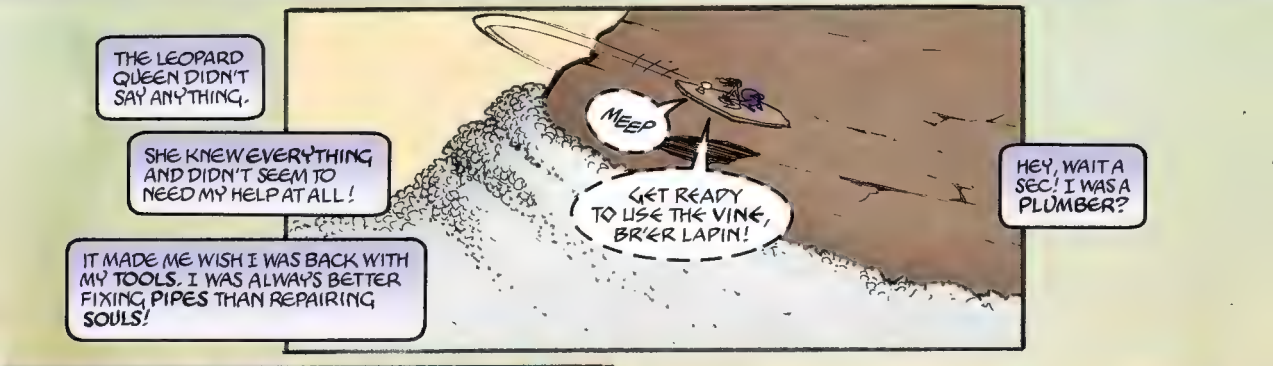
IS IT WORKING? ARE YOU IN *BOTH* PLANES OF EXISTENCE AT *ONCE?*

I THINK SO. IT'S NOT PERFECT AND WE AREN'T **BOTH** GETTING FEEDBACK AT ONCE...

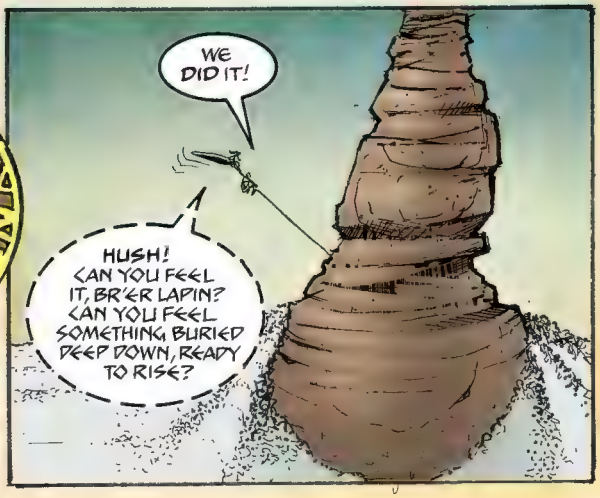
BUT I THINK IF I CAN KEEP GOING, I'LL REACH THE PLACE WHERE THE TWO UNIVERSES **JOIN**...WHEREVER THAT IS.


WE'RE HERE!
SHHH... KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.
EEP!
WHY?
THE TEENIEST VOICE IN THIS VALLEY WILL REVERBERATE AND AWAKEN THE DREADED...
...HOOLY.
THE WHATTY?
SHOOT. I CHIPPED OFF A PIECE.
CRACK
MREEP
CAREFUL!
HEY! IT FLOATS!
THAT LITTLE ROCK YOU CHIPPED OFF WILL GO FLOATING INTO THE HORIZON, ONLY TO CIRCLE OUR FORTRESS AND COME SPEEDING BACK.


OH.
BUT WE'LL BE LONG GONE BY THEN, RIGHT?
WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE, ANYWAY?


THE LEOPARD QUEEN DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.
SHE KNEW EVERYTHING AND DIDN'T SEEM TO NEED MY HELP AT ALL!
IT MADE ME WISH I WAS BACK WITH MY TOOLS. I WAS ALWAYS BETTER FIXING PIPES THAN REPAIRING SOULS!
MEEP
GET READY TO USE THE VINE, BR'ER LAPIN!
HEY, WAIT A SEC! I WAS A PLUMBER?

NOW, BR'ER LAPIN!
I'M ON IT!
BINGO!
CHUNK!


WE DID IT!
HUSH! CAN YOU FEEL IT, BR'ER LAPIN? CAN YOU FEEL SOMETHING, BURIED DEEP DOWN, READY TO RISE?

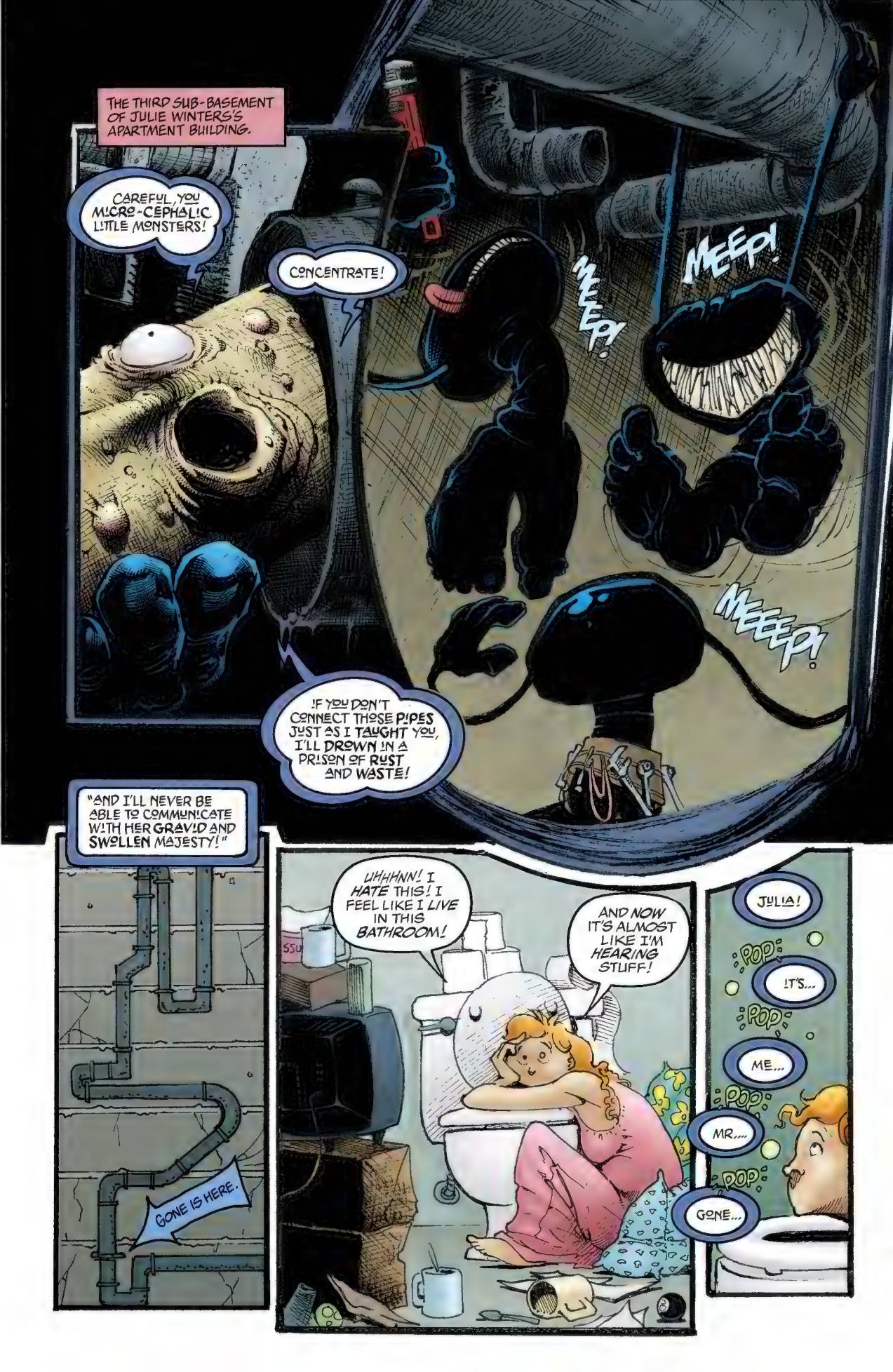
eep?
I THINK HE WANTS TO COME WITH US.
HE'LL BE FINE. COME ON.
UUUHN! THE VINE'S SLIPPERY!
YOU'RE TOO HEAVY! HURRY OR YOU'LL SNAP IT!
I REMEMBERED THE HOT, FLARING LAVA, THE BURNING WHEN I DIPPED MY CLAWS IN IT TO TEMPER THEM, SO MANY YEARS BEFORE...
PAST EVENTS WERE COMING BACK TO ME IN A FLOOD!

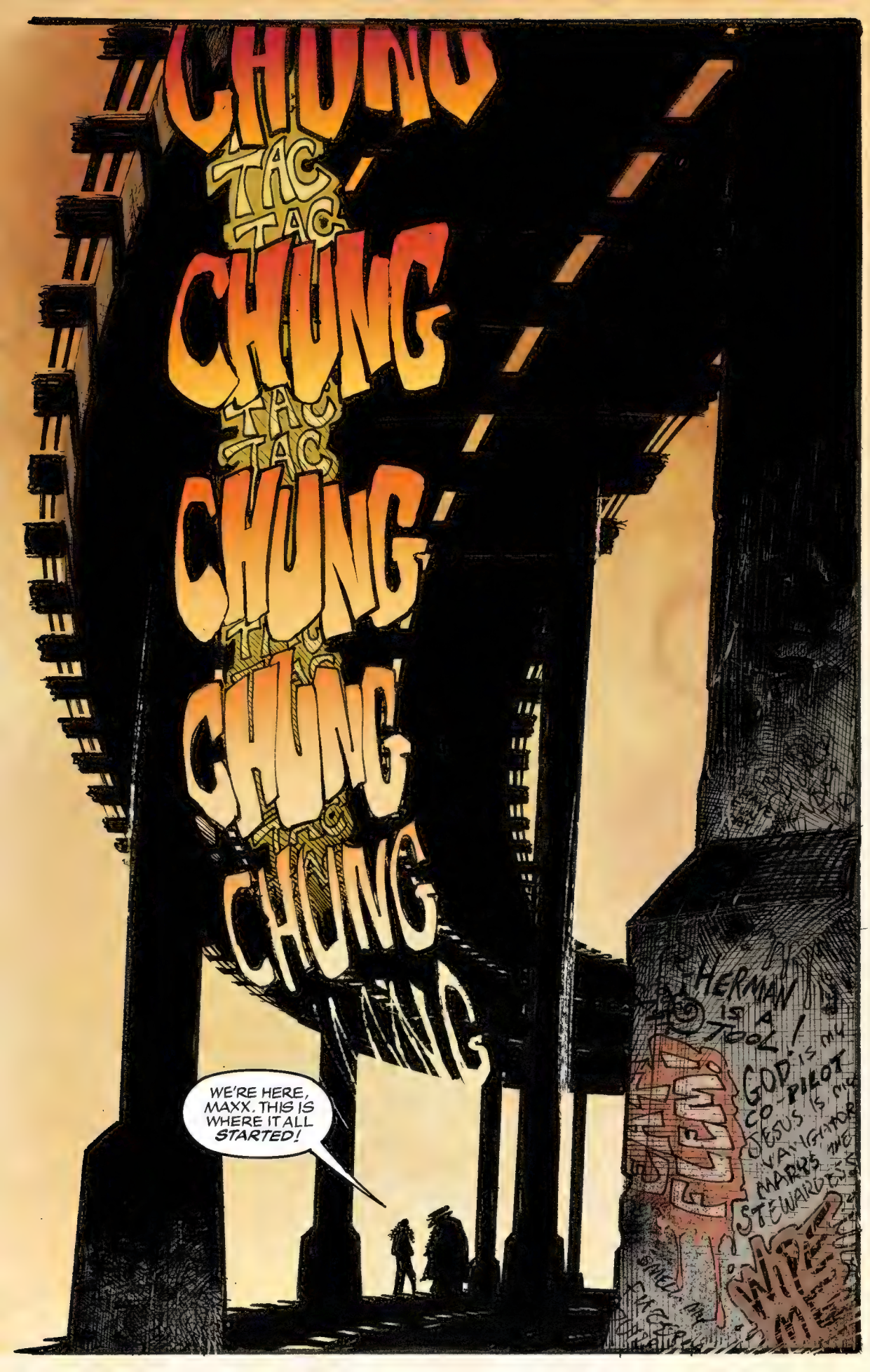
I THOUGHT YOU SAID WE'D BE DRAWN HERE!
WE ARE BEING DRAWN. I NEVER SAID IT'D BE EASY.
SLOW DOWN! YOU'RE LEAVING ME BEHIND!
UGGH! JUST DON'T HOLD ME BACK!
IT WAS ALL I COULD DO TO KEEP MY FOOTING!

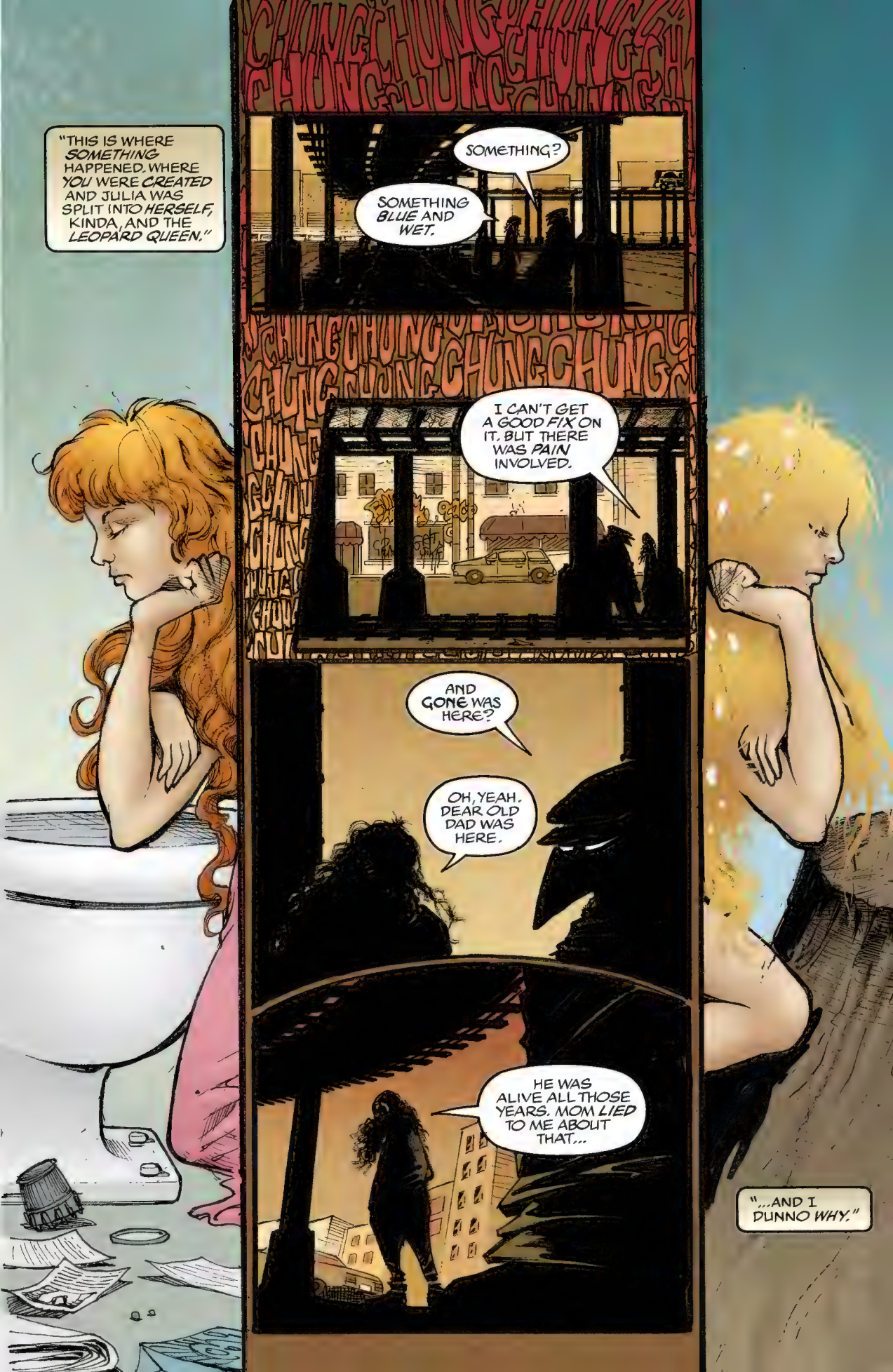
HEY! IT'S JUST WATER!
SILLY RABBIT! THAT'S JUST ON TOP!
UNDERNEATH...
...THERE'S SOMETHING THAT WANTS TO COME UP.

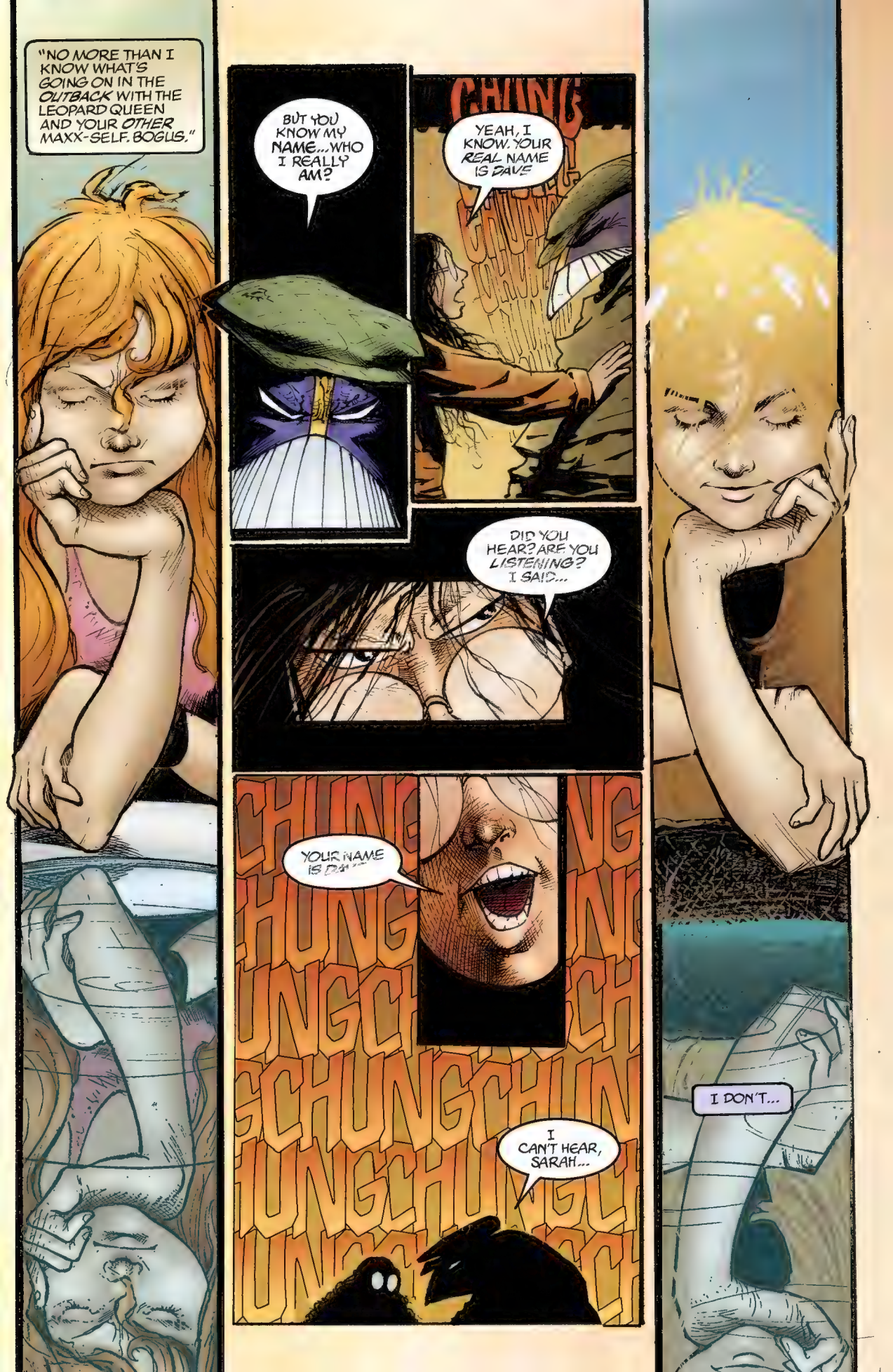
Chapter Six

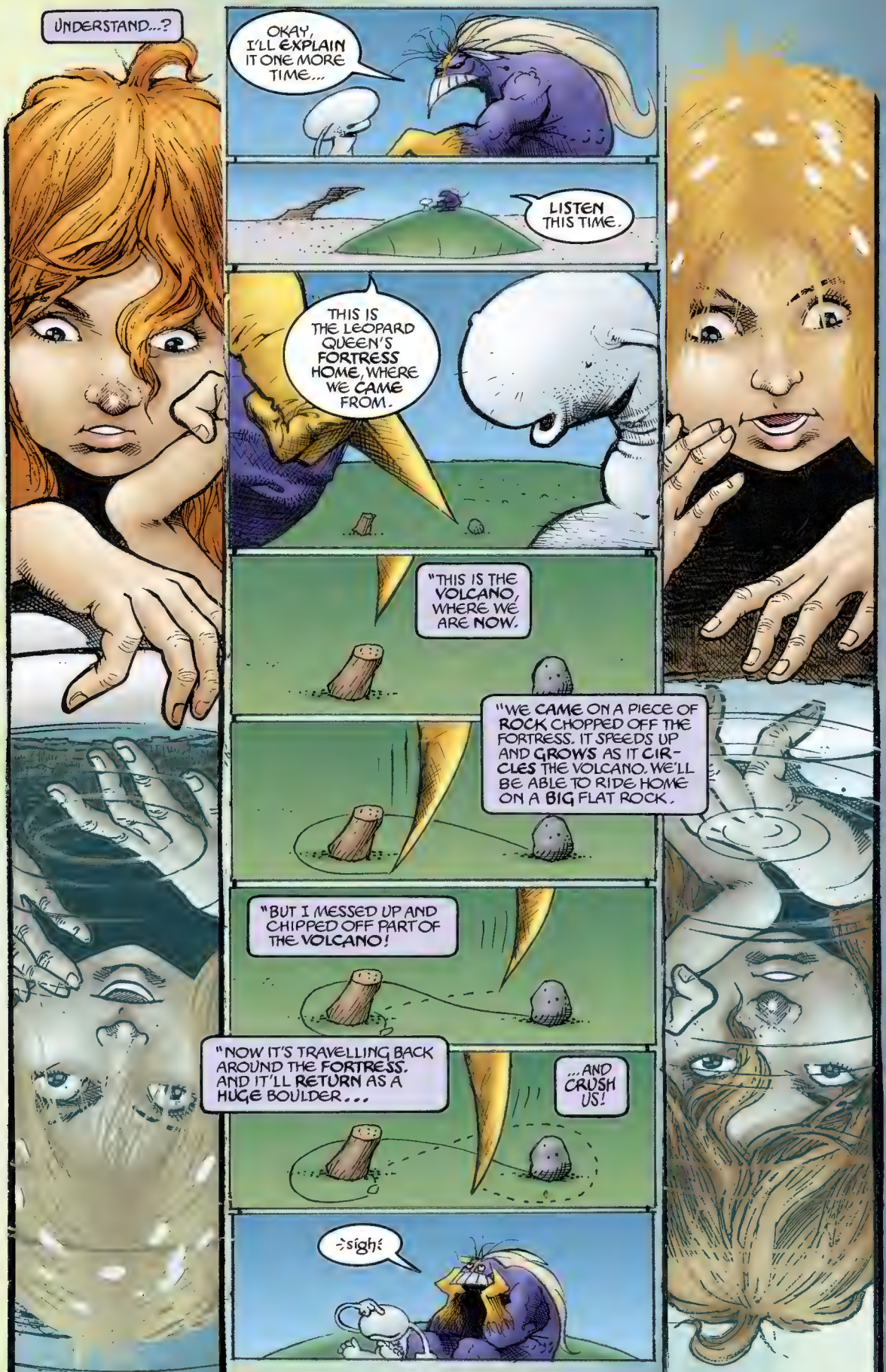
THE MASK

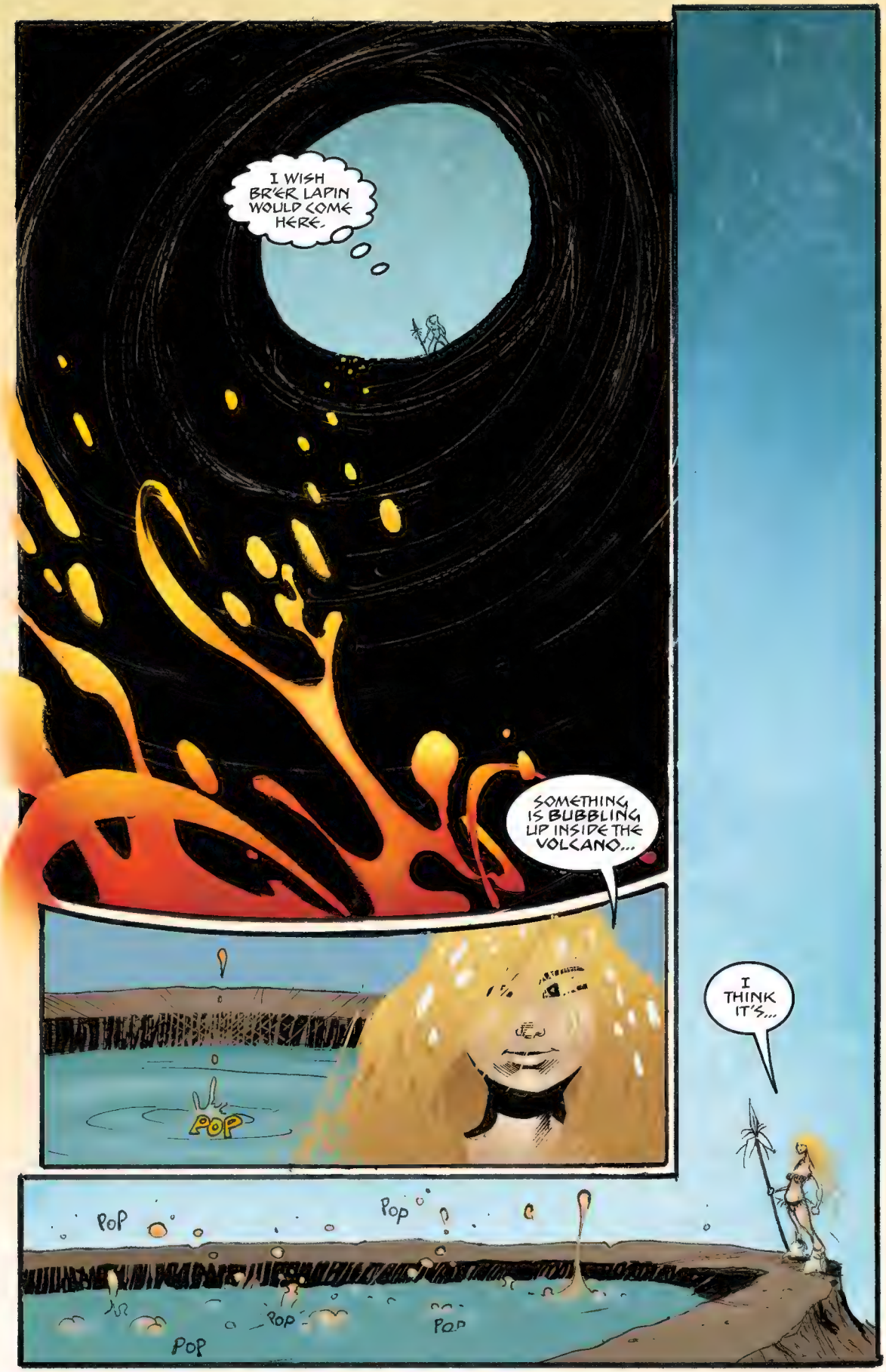

THE THIRD SUB-BASEMENT OF JULIE WINTERS'S APARTMENT BUILDING.
CAREFUL, YOU MICRO-CEPHALIC LITTLE MONSTERS!
CONCENTRATE!
MEEP!
MEEP!
MEEEP!
IF YOU DON'T CONNECT THOSE PIPES JUST AS I TAUGHT YOU, I'LL DROWN IN A PRISON OF RUST AND WASTE!
"AND I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH HER GRAVID AND SWOLLEN MAJESTY!"
GONE IS HERE.
UHHHNN! I HATE THIS! I FEEL LIKE I LIVE IN THIS BATHROOM!
AND NOW IT'S ALMOST LIKE I'M HEARING STUFF!
JULIA!
POP!
IT'S...
POP
ME...
POP
MR....
POP
GONE...

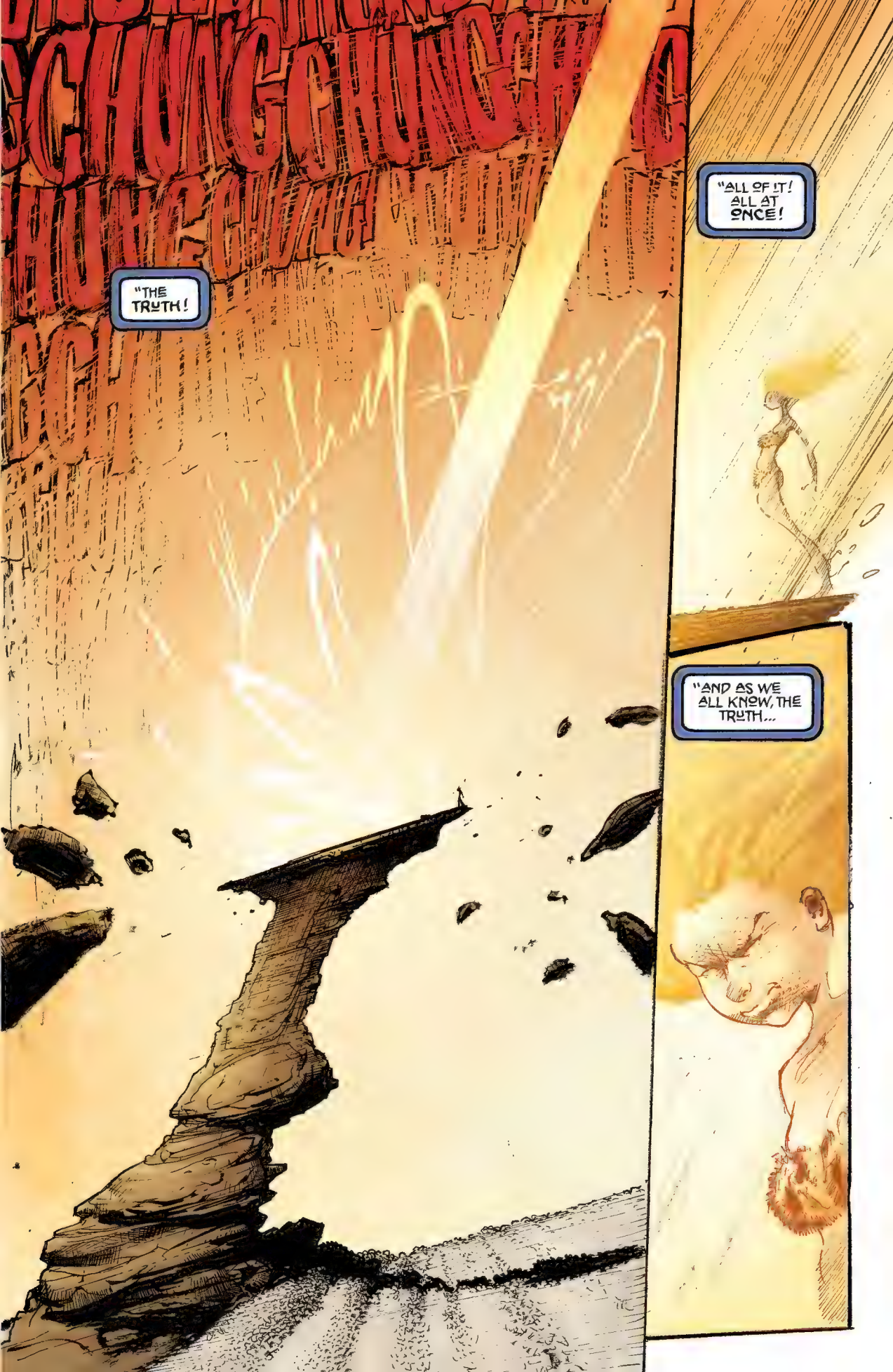

CHUNG
TAC
TAC
CHUNG
TAC
TAC
CHUNG
TAC
TAC
CHUNG
TAC
CHUNG
WE'RE HERE, MAXX. THIS IS WHERE IT ALL STARTED!
HERMAN IS A TOOL!
GOD IS MY CO-PILOT
JESUS IS MY NAVIGATOR
MARYS THE STEWARDESS

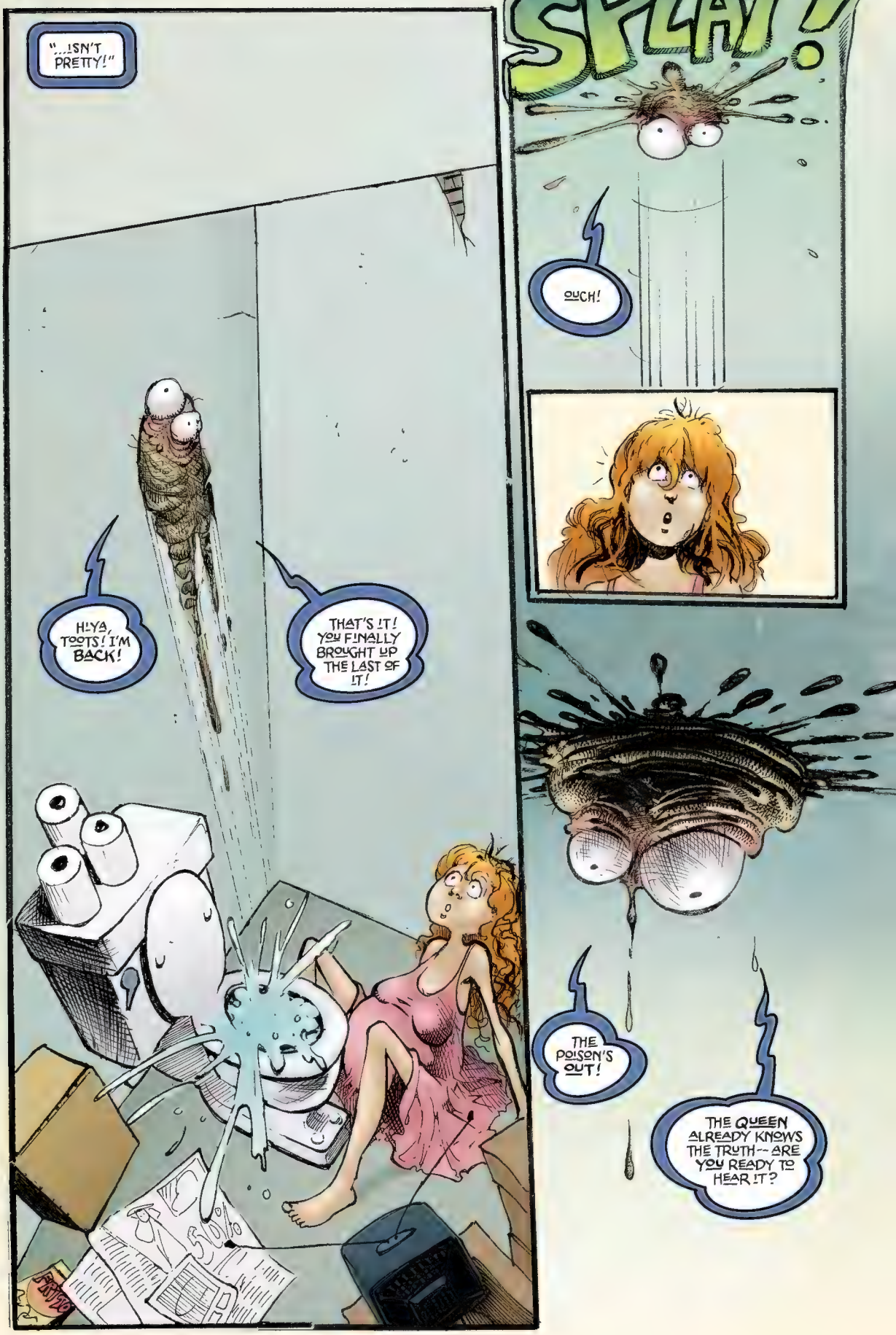

"THIS IS WHERE SOMETHING HAPPENED. WHERE YOU WERE CREATED AND JULIA WAS SPLIT INTO HERSELF, KINDA, AND THE LEOPARD QUEEN."
CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG
SOMETHING?
SOMETHING BLUE AND WET.
CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG
I CAN'T GET A GOOD FIX ON IT, BUT THERE WAS PAIN INVOLVED.
AND GONE WAS HERE?
OH, YEAH. DEAR OLD DAD WAS HERE.
HE WAS ALIVE ALL THOSE YEARS. MOM LIED TO ME ABOUT THAT...
"...AND I DUNNO WHY."


"NO MORE THAN I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE OUTBACK WITH THE LEOPARD QUEEN AND YOUR OTHER MAXX-SELF. BOGUS."
BUT YOU KNOW MY NAME...WHO I REALLY AM?
YEAH, I KNOW. YOUR REAL NAME IS DAVE
DID YOU HEAR? ARE YOU LISTENING? I SAID...
YOUR NAME IS DA--
I CAN'T HEAR, SARAH...
I DON'T...

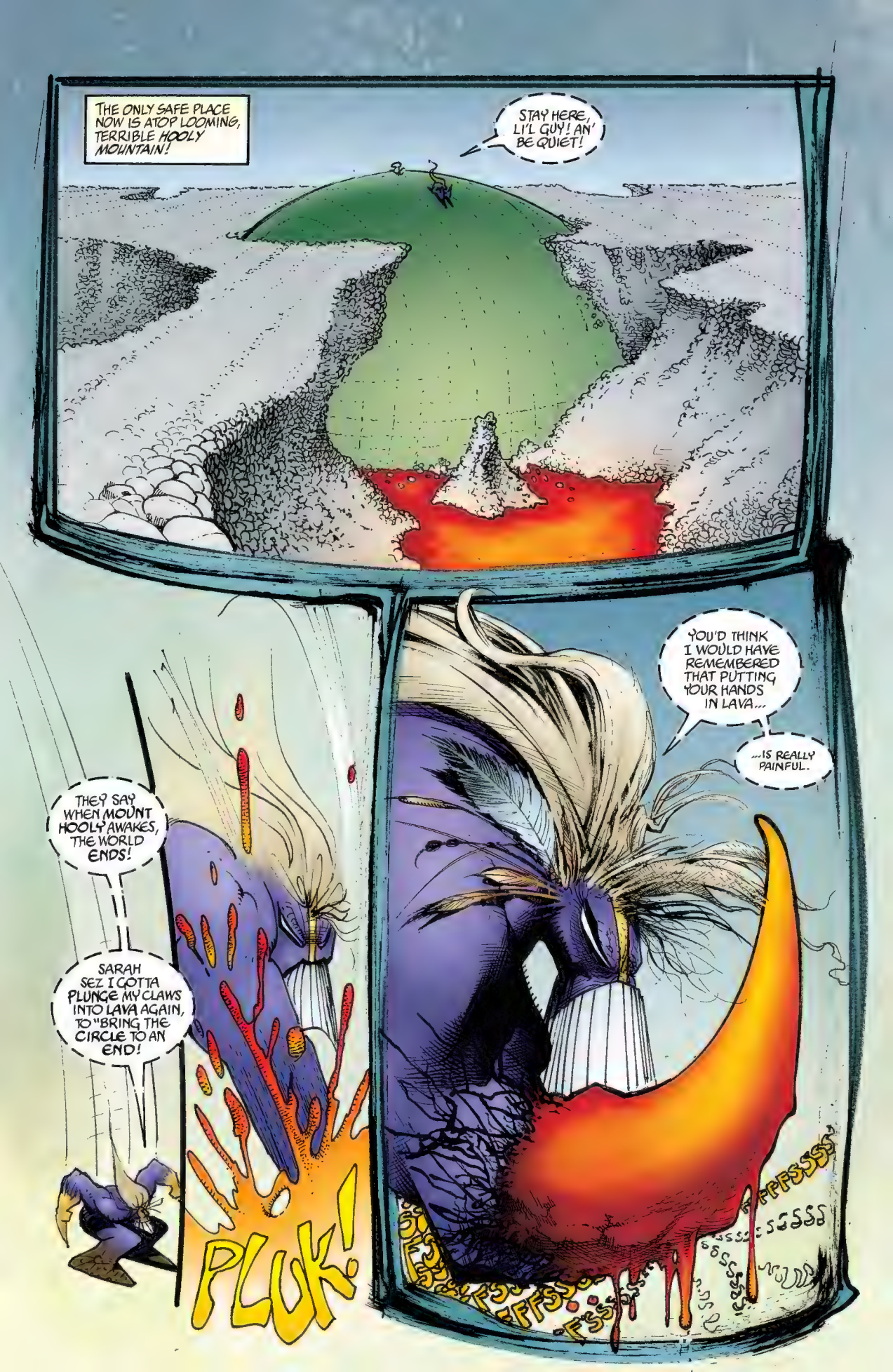

UNDERSTAND...?
OKAY, I'LL EXPLAIN IT ONE MORE TIME...
LISTEN THIS TIME.
THIS IS THE LEOPARD QUEEN'S FORTRESS HOME, WHERE WE CAME FROM.
"THIS IS THE VOLCANO, WHERE WE ARE NOW.
"WE CAME ON A PIECE OF ROCK CHOPPED OFF THE FORTRESS. IT SPEEDS UP AND GROWS AS IT CIRCLES THE VOLCANO. WE'LL BE ABLE TO RIDE HOME ON A BIG FLAT ROCK.
"BUT I MESSED UP AND CHIPPED OFF PART OF THE VOLCANO!
"NOW IT'S TRAVELLING BACK AROUND THE FORTRESS. AND IT'LL RETURN AS A HUGE BOULDER...
...AND CRUSH US!
:sigh:

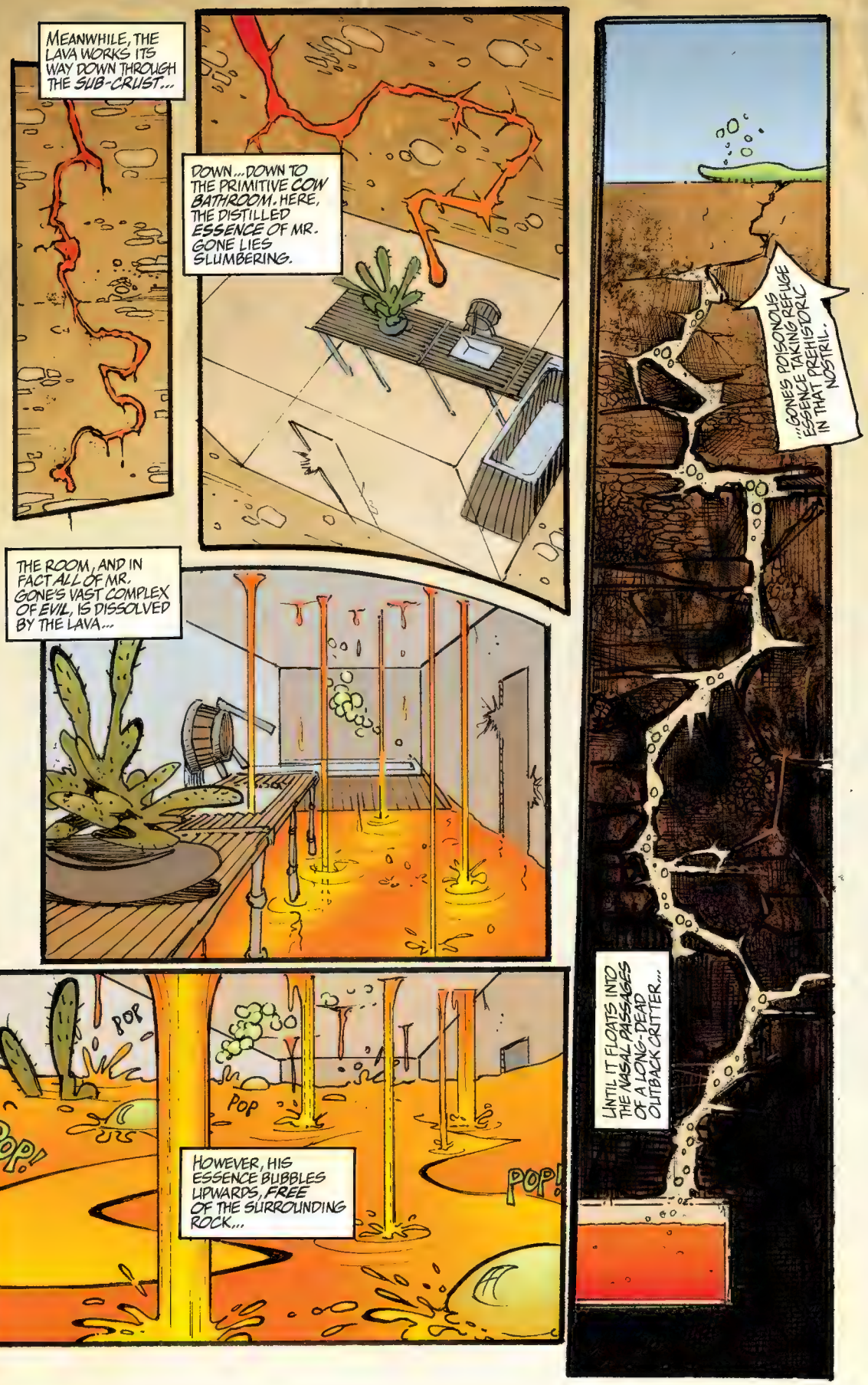

I WISH BR'ER LAPIN WOULD COME HERE.
SOMETHING IS BUBBLING UP INSIDE THE VOLCANO...
POP
I THINK IT'S...
Pop
Pop
Pop
Pop
Pop

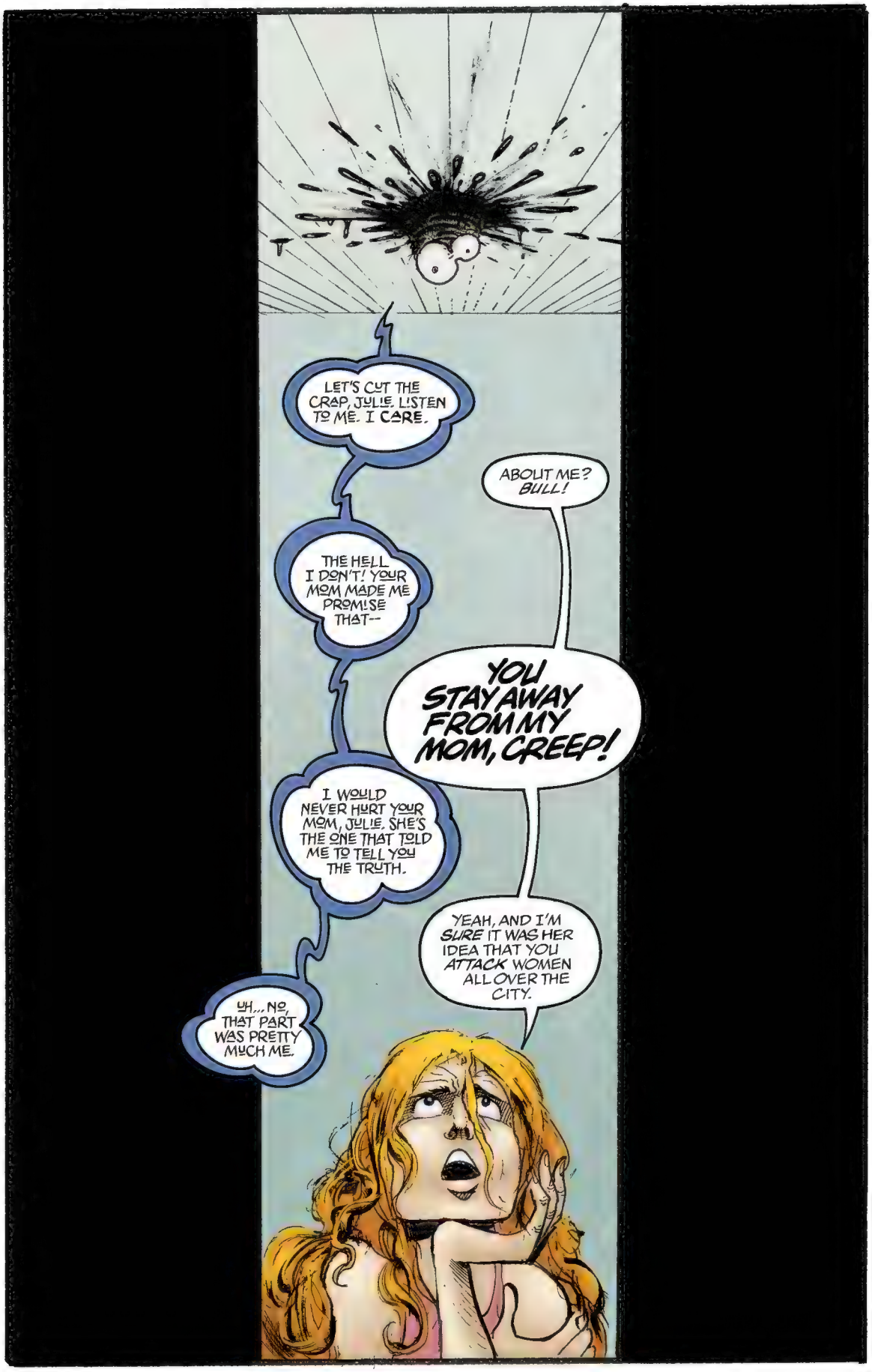

"THE TRUTH!
"ALL OF IT! ALL AT ONCE!
"AND AS WE ALL KNOW, THE TRUTH...

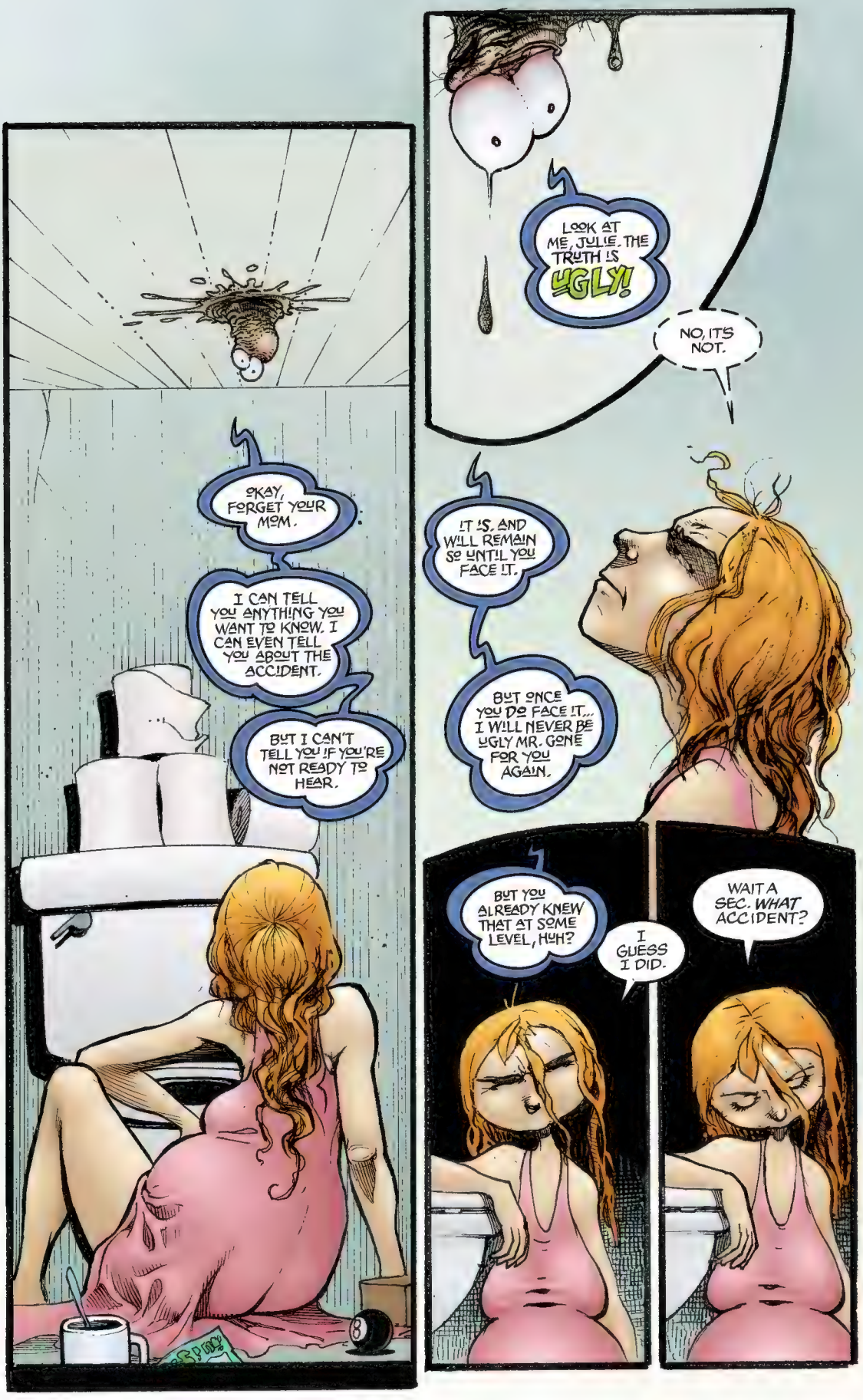

"...ISN'T PRETTY!"
SPLAT!
OUCH!
HI-YA, TOOTS! I'M BACK!
THAT'S IT! YOU FINALLY BROUGHT UP THE LAST OF IT!
THE POISON'S OUT!
THE QUEEN ALREADY KNOWS THE TRUTH-- ARE YOU READY TO HEAR IT?

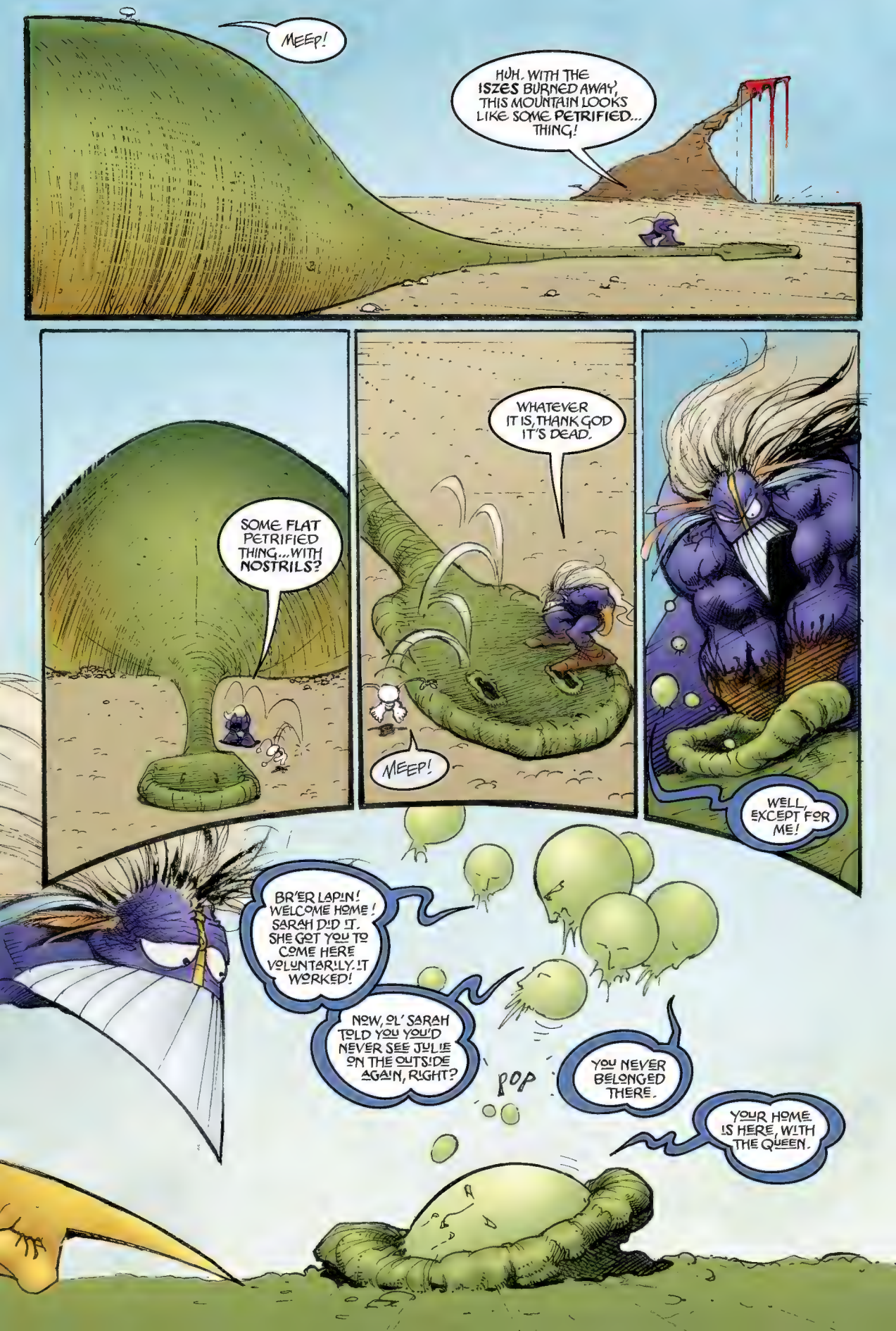
AND THE TRUTH, OR AT LEAST THE ACID LAVA, BEGINS TO EAT AWAY AT THE LAYERS OF ISZ SKULLS...
...RELEASING THE DIRE FROGS, WHO HAD BEEN TRAPPED IN THE MUD UNDERNEATH. THEY SCUTTLE FREE...
...AND LEAP TOWARDS THE SUN, FILLING THE SKY WITH FEATHERS AND WARTS!
AND STILL THE BURNING RAIN CONTINUES TO EAT AWAY THE SKULLS...
FFFSSSS
FSSSSS
...UNTIL THE STERILE GROUND BENEATH IS EXPOSED...
...AND THE LAVA COVERS ALL!


THE ONLY SAFE PLACE NOW IS ATOP LOOMING, TERRIBLE HOOLY MOUNTAIN!
STAY HERE, LI'L GUY! AN' BE QUIET!
THEY SAY WHEN MOUNT HOOLY AWAKES, THE WORLD ENDS!
SARAH SEZ I GOTTA PLUNGE MY CLAWS INTO LAVA AGAIN, TO "BRING THE CIRCLE TO AN END!
PLUK!
YOU'D THINK I WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED THAT PUTTING YOUR HANDS IN LAVA...
...IS REALLY PAINFUL.

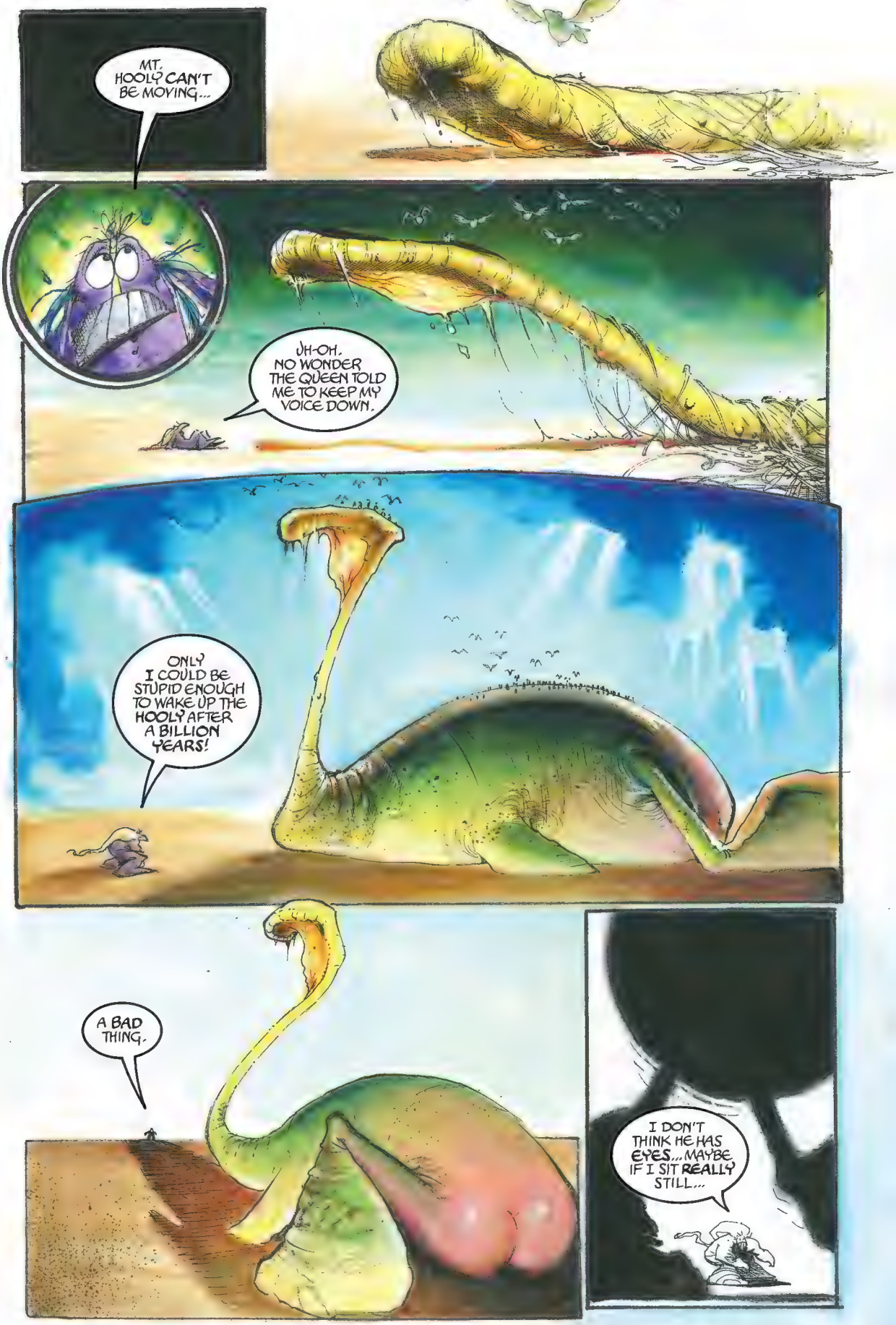

MEANWHILE, THE LAVA WORKS ITS WAY DOWN THROUGH THE SUB-CRUST...
DOWN... DOWN TO THE PRIMITIVE COW BATHROOM. HERE, THE DISTILLED ESSENCE OF MR. GONE LIES SLUMBERING.
THE ROOM, AND IN FACT ALL OF MR. GONE'S VAST COMPLEX OF EVIL, IS DISSOLVED BY THE LAVA...
POP!
POP
POP
POP!
HOWEVER, HIS ESSENCE BUBBLES UPWARDS, FREE OF THE SURROUNDING ROCK...
...GONE'S POISONOUS ESSENCE TAKING REFUGE IN THAT PREHISTORIC NOSTRIL.
UNTIL IT FLOATS INTO THE NASAL PASSAGES OF A LONG-DEAD OUTBACK CRITTER...


LET'S CUT THE CRAP, JULIE. LISTEN TO ME. I CARE.
ABOUT ME? BULL!
THE HELL I DON'T! YOUR MOM MADE ME PROMISE THAT--
YOU STAY AWAY FROM MY MOM, CREEP!
I WOULD NEVER HURT YOUR MOM, JULIE. SHE'S THE ONE THAT TOLD ME TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH.
YEAH, AND I'M SURE IT WAS HER IDEA THAT YOU ATTACK WOMEN ALL OVER THE CITY.
UH... NO, THAT PART WAS PRETTY MUCH ME.


LOOK AT ME, JULIE. THE TRUTH IS UGLY!
NO, IT'S NOT.
IT IS, AND WILL REMAIN SO UNTIL YOU FACE IT.
BUT ONCE YOU DO FACE IT... I WILL NEVER BE UGLY MR. GONE FOR YOU AGAIN.
OKAY, FORGET YOUR MOM.
I CAN TELL YOU ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW. I CAN EVEN TELL YOU ABOUT THE ACCIDENT.
BUT I CAN'T TELL YOU IF YOU'RE NOT READY TO HEAR.
BUT YOU ALREADY KNEW THAT AT SOME LEVEL, HUH?
I GUESS I DID.
WAIT A SEC. WHAT ACCIDENT?

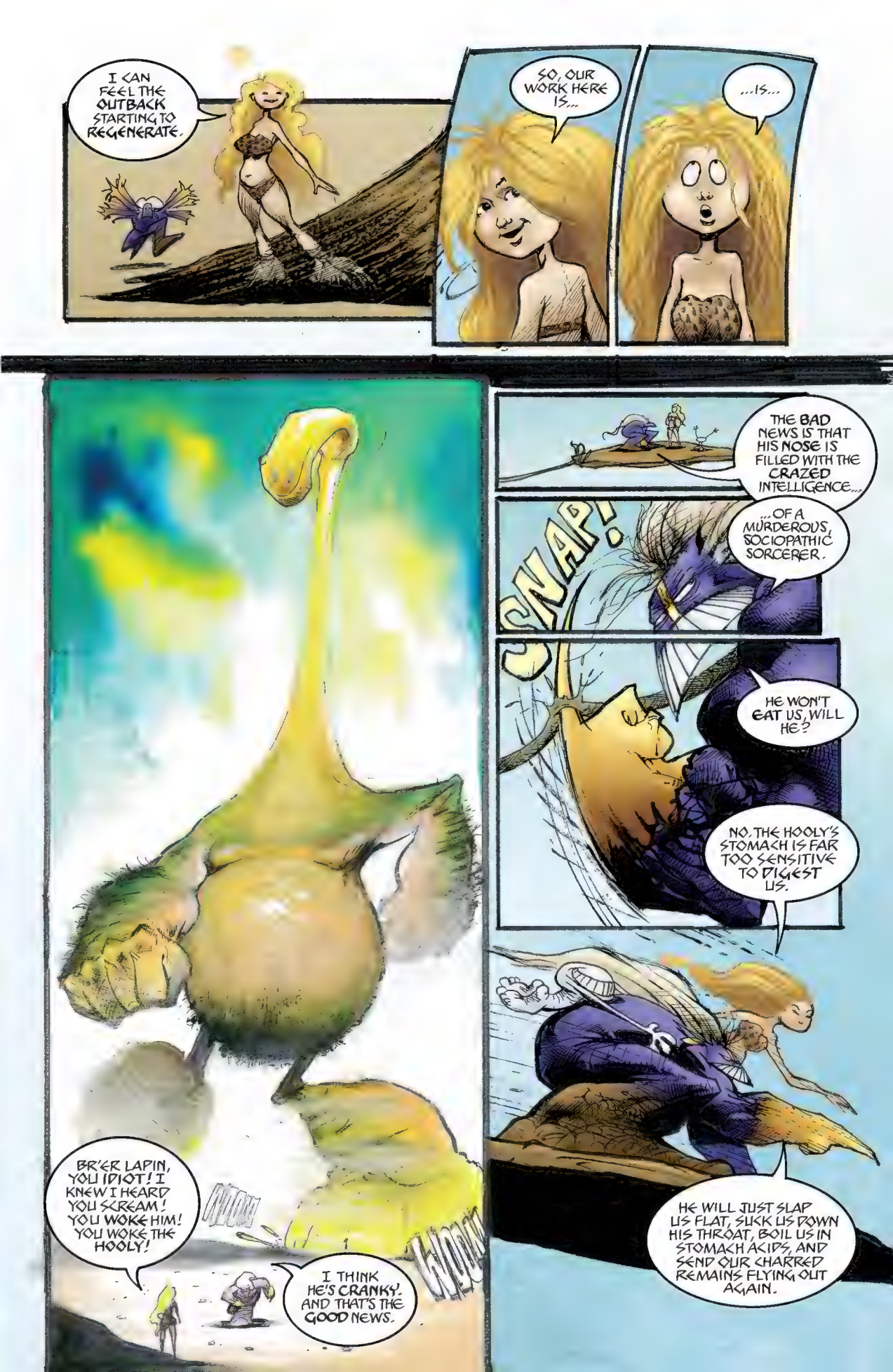

MEEP!
HUH. WITH THE ISZES BURNED AWAY, THIS MOUNTAIN LOOKS LIKE SOME PETRIFIED... THING!
SOME FLAT PETRIFIED THING... WITH NOSTRILS?
WHATEVER IT IS, THANK GOD IT'S DEAD.
MEEP!
WELL, EXCEPT FOR ME!
BR'ER LAPIN! WELCOME HOME! SARAH DID IT. SHE GOT YOU TO COME HERE VOLUNTARILY. IT WORKED!
NOW, OL' SARAH TOLD YOU YOU'D NEVER SEE JULIE ON THE OUTSIDE AGAIN, RIGHT?
POP
YOU NEVER BELONGED THERE.
YOUR HOME IS HERE, WITH THE QUEEN.

YOU KNOW THE GUY JULIE RAN OVER THAT NIGHT IN HER BUICK?
THE GUY SHE THOUGHT WAS TRYING TO...
...ATTACK HER?
WHAT ACCIDENT?
I DO REMEMBER SOMETHING...IT WAS RAINING...CAR LIGHTS... SOMEBODY COVERING ME WITH GARBAGE... OLD LAMPS... BROKEN--
MAXX, WHO ARE YOU *TALKING* TO?
POP
SO, YOU KNEW YOU COULD NEVER GO BACK, RIGHT?
YOU KNEW YOU DIDN'T REALLY EXIST IN THE OUTER WORLD...RIGHT?
POP
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH
POP
GOTTA CALM DOWN.
THINK THIS THROUGH...
SNORT!
MERDE.


MT. HOOLY CAN'T BE MOVING...
UH-OH. NO WONDER THE QUEEN TOLD ME TO KEEP MY VOICE DOWN.
ONLY I COULD BE STUPID ENOUGH TO WAKE UP THE HOOLY AFTER A BILLION YEARS!
A BAD THING.
I DON'T THINK HE HAS EYES... MAYBE IF I SIT REALLY STILL...

EASY, HOOLY...
NICE HOOLY...
shhh...

BOOM!
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM
SLAP!
GREAT. I'M GONNA GET SLAPPED TO DEATH.
GOTTA GET TO THE FLYING ROCK, AND FAST!
BR'ER LAPIN, THERE YOU ARE!


I CAN FEEL THE OUTBACK STARTING TO REGENERATE.
SO, OUR WORK HERE IS...
...IS...
THE BAD NEWS IS THAT HIS NOSE IS FILLED WITH THE CRAZED INTELLIGENCE...
...OF A MURDEROUS, SOCIOPATHIC SORCERER.
SNAP!
HE WON'T EAT US, WILL HE?
NO. THE HOOLY'S STOMACH IS FAR TOO SENSITIVE TO DIGEST US.
HE WILL JUST SLAP US FLAT, SUCK US DOWN HIS THROAT, BOIL US IN STOMACH ACIDS, AND SEND OUR CHARRED REMAINS FLYING OUT AGAIN.
BR'ER LAPIN, YOU IDIOT! I KNEW I HEARD YOU SCREAM! YOU WOKE HIM! YOU WOKE THE HOOLY!
I THINK HE'S CRANKY. AND THAT'S THE GOOD NEWS.
WOOOH

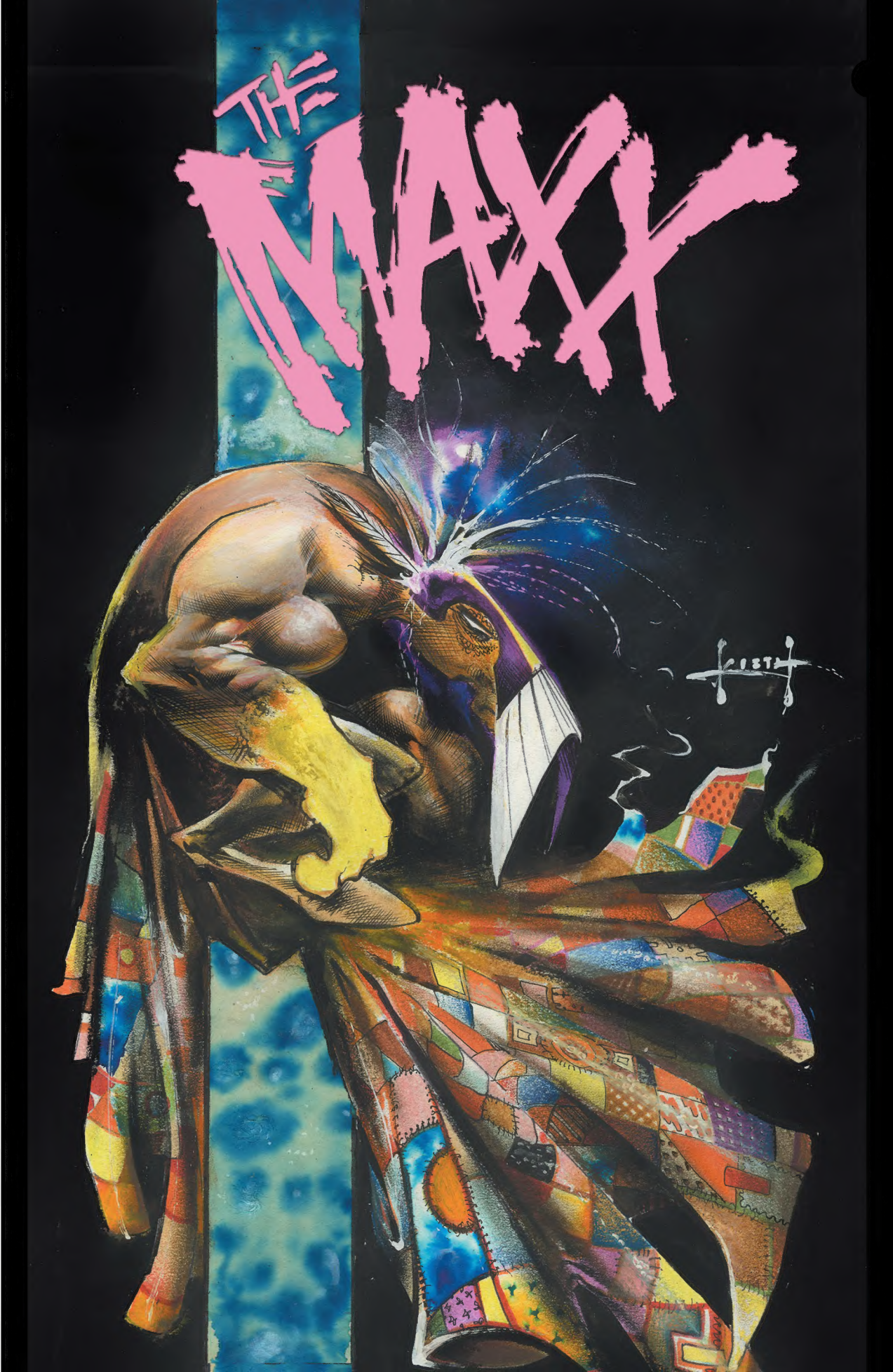
SO WE'D BE DEAD, BUT NOT EATEN?
PRETTY MUCH.
;WHEW.;

Sam Kieth

THE MASK
©

THE MASK
GUESS WHO'S...
...BACK?

THE
MAXX


THE
MAXX